Wm Keith
Northern Bldg

THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME THREE

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CONTENTS

PAGE

Naboth's Vineyard .....*Melville Davisson Post* 5

The Problem of the Five Marks
Melville Davisson Post 20

The Inspiration .....*Melville Davisson Post* 35

The Phantom Woman .....*Melville Davisson Post* 48

The New Administration ..*Melville Davisson Post* 63

The Pigeon on the Sill .....*Herman Landon* 81

The Greuze Girl .....*Freeman Wills Crofts* 111

The House of Many Mansions
Frederick Irving Anderson 134

The Un-Punctual Painting .....*Bertram Atkey* 156

The White Line .....*John Ferguson* 179

THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

One hears a good deal about the sovereignty of the people in this republic; and many persons imagine it a sort of fiction, and wonder where it lies, who are the guardians of it, and how they would exercise it if the forms and agents of the law were removed. I am not one of those who speculate upon this mystery, for I have seen this primal ultimate authority naked at its work. And, having seen it, I know how mighty and how dread a thing it is. And I know where it lies, and who are the guardians of it, and how they exercise it when the need arises.

There was a great crowd, for the whole country was in the courtroom. It was a notorious trial.

Elihu Marsh had been shot down in his house. He had been found lying in a room, with a hole through his body that one could put his thumb in. He was an irascible old man, the last of his family, and so, lived alone. He had rich lands, but only a life estate in them, the remainder was to some foreign heirs. A girl from a neighboring farm came now and then to bake and put his house in order, and he kept a farm hand about the premises.

Nothing had been disturbed in the house when the neighbors found Marsh; no robbery had been attempted, for the man's money, a considerable sum, remained on him.

(From "Uncle Abner," by Melville Davisson Post. Copyright, 1928, by D. Appleton and Company.)

There was not much mystery about the thing, because the farm hand had disappeared. This man was a stranger in the hills. He had come from over the mountains some months before, and gone to work for Marsh. He was a big blond man, young and good looking; of better blood, one would say, than the average laborer. He gave his name as Taylor, but he was not communicative, and little else about him was known.

The country was raised, and this man was overtaken in the foothills of the mountains. He had his clothes tied into a bundle, and a long-barreled fowling-piece on his shoulder. The story he told was that he and Marsh had settled that morning, and he had left the house at noon, but that he had forgotten his gun and had gone back for it; had reached the house about four o'clock, gone into the kitchen, got his gun down from the dogwood forks over the chimney, and at once left the house. He had not seen Marsh, and did not know where he was.

He admitted that this gun had been loaded with a single huge lead bullet. He had so loaded it to kill a dog that sometimes approached the house, but not close enough to be reached with a load of shot. He affected surprise when it was pointed out that the gun had been discharged. He said that he had not fired it, and had not, until then, noticed that it was empty. When asked why he had so suddenly determined to leave the country, he was silent.

He was carried back and confined in the county jail, and now he was on trial at the September term of the circuit court.

The court sat early. Although the judge, Simon Kilrail, was a landowner and lived on his estate in the country some half dozen miles away, he rode to the courthouse in the morning, and home at night, with his legal papers in his saddle-pockets. It was only when the court sat that he was a lawyer. At other times he harvested his hay and grazed his cattle, and tried to add to his lands like any other man in the hills, and he was as hard in a trade and as hungry for an acre as any.

It was the sign and insignia of distinction in Virginia to own land. Mr. Jefferson had annulled the titles that George the Third had granted, and the land alone remained as a patent of nobility. The Judge wished to be one of these landed gentry, and he had gone a good way to accomplish it. But when the court convened he became a lawyer and sat upon the bench with no heart in him, and a cruel tongue like the English judges.

I think everybody was at this trial. My Uncle Abner and the strange old doctor, Storm, sat on a bench near the center aisle of the courtroom, and I sat behind them, for I was a half-grown lad, and permitted to witness the terrors and severities of the law.

The prisoner was the center of interest. He sat with a stolid countenance like a man careless of the issues of life. But not everybody was concerned with him, for my Uncle Abner and Storm watched the girl who had been accustomed to bake for Marsh and red up his house.

She was a beauty of her type; dark haired and dark eyed like a gypsy, and with an April nature of storm and sun. She sat among the witnesses with a little handkerchief clutched in her hands. She was nervous to the point of hysteria, and I thought that was the reason the old doctor watched her. She would be taken with a gust of tears, and then throw up her head with a fine defiance; and she kneaded and knotted and worked the handkerchief in her fingers. It was a time of stress and many witnesses were unnerved, and I think I should not have noticed this girl but for the whispering of Storm and my Uncle Abner.

The trial went forward, and it became certain that the prisoner would hang. His stubborn refusal to give any reason for his hurried departure had but one meaning, and the circumstantial evidence was conclusive. The motive, only, remained in doubt, and the Judge had charged on this with so many cases in point, and with so heavy a hand, that any virtue in it was removed. The Judge was hard against this man, and indeed there was little sym-

pathy anywhere, for it was a foul killing—the victim an old man and no hot blood to excuse it.

In all trials of great public interest, where the evidences of guilt overwhelmingly assemble against a prisoner, there comes a moment when all the people in the courtroom, as one man, and without a sign of the common purpose, agree upon a verdict; there is no outward or visible evidence of this decision, but one feels it, and it is a moment of the tensest stress.

The trial of Taylor had reached this point, and there lay a moment of deep silence, when this girl sitting among the witnesses suddenly burst into a very hysteria of tears. She stood up shaking with sobs, her voice choking in her throat, and the tears gushing through her fingers.

What she said was not heard at the time by the audience in the courtroom, but it brought the Judge to his feet and the jury crowding about her, and it broke down the silence of the prisoner, and threw him into a perfect fury of denials. We could hear his voice rise above the confusion, and we could see him struggling to get to the girl and stop her. But what she said was presently known to everybody, for it was taken down and signed; and it put the case against Taylor, to use a lawyer's term, out of court.

The girl had killed Marsh herself. And this was the manner and the reason of it: She and Taylor were sweethearts and were to be married. But they had quarreled the night before Marsh's death and the following morning Taylor had left the country. The point of the quarrel was some remark that Marsh had made to Taylor touching the girl's reputation. She had come to the house in the afternoon, and finding her lover gone, and maddened at the sight of the one who had robbed her of him, had taken the gun down from the chimney and killed Marsh. She had then put the gun back into its place and left the house. This was about two o'clock in the afternoon, and about an hour before Taylor returned for his gun.

There was a great veer of public feeling with a profound sense of having come at last upon the truth, for

the story not only fitted to the circumstantial evidence against Taylor, but it fitted also to his story and it disclosed the motive for the killing. It explained, too, why he had refused to give the reason for his disappearance. That Taylor denied what the girl said and tried to stop her in her declaration, meant nothing except that the prisoner was a man, and would not have the woman he loved make such a sacrifice for him.

I cannot give all the forms of legal procedure with which the closing hours of the court were taken up, but nothing happened to shake the girl's confession. Whatever the law required was speedily got ready, and she was remanded to the care of the sheriff in order that she might come before the court in the morning.

Taylor was not released, but was also held in custody, although the case against him seemed utterly broken down. The Judge refused to permit the prisoner's counsel to take a verdict. He said that he would withdraw a juror and continue the case. But he seemed unwilling to release any clutch of the law until some one was punished for this crime.

It was on our way, and we rode out with the Judge that night. He talked with Abner and Storm about the pastures and the price of cattle, but not about the trial, as I hoped he would do, except once only, and then it was to inquire why the prosecuting attorney had not called either of them as witnesses, since they were the first to find Marsh, and Storm had been among the doctors who examined him. And Storm had explained how he had mortally offended the prosecutor in his canvass, by his remark that only a gentleman should hold office. He did but quote Mr. Hamilton, Storm said, but the man had received it as a deadly insult, and thereby proved the truth of Mr. Hamilton's expression, Storm added. And Abner said that as no circumstance about Marsh's death was questioned, and others arriving about the same time had been called, the prosecutor doubtless considered further testimony unnecessary.

The Judge nodded, and the conversation turned to other

questions. At the gate, after the common formal courtesy of the country, the Judge asked us to ride in, and, to my astonishment, Abner and Storm accepted his invitation. I could see that the man was surprised, and I thought annoyed, but he took us into his library.

I could not understand why Abner and Storm had stopped here, until I remembered how from the first they had been considering the girl, and it occurred to me that they thus sought the Judge in the hope of getting some word to him in her favor. A great sentiment had leaped up for this girl. She had made a staggering sacrifice, and with a headlong courage, and it was like these men to help her if they could.

And it was to speak of the woman that they came, but not in her favor. And while Simon Kilrail listened, they told this extraordinary story: They had been of the opinion that Taylor was not guilty when the trial began, but they had suffered it to proceed in order to see what might develop. The reason was that there were certain circumstantial evidences, overlooked by the prosecutor, indicating the guilt of the woman and the innocence of Taylor. When Storm examined the body of Marsh he discovered that the man had been killed by poison, and was dead when the bullet was fired into his body. This meant that the shooting was a fabricated evidence to direct suspicion against Taylor. The woman had baked for Marsh on this morning, and the poison was in the bread which he had eaten at noon.

Abner was going on to explain something further, when a servant entered and asked the Judge what time it was. The man had been greatly impressed, and he now sat in a profound reflection. He took his watch out of his pocket and held it in his hand, then he seemed to realize the question and replied that his watch had run down. Abner gave the hour, and said that perhaps his key would wind the watch. The Judge gave it to him, and he wound it and laid it on the table. Storm observed my Uncle with, what I thought, a curious interest, but the Judge paid no attention. He was deep in his reflection and oblivious to

everything. Finally he roused himself and made his comment.

"This clears the matter up," he said. "The woman killed Marsh from the motive which she gave in her confession, and she created this false evidence against Taylor because he had abandoned her. She thereby avenged herself desperately in two directions. . . . It would be like a woman to do this, and then regret it and confess."

He then asked my Uncle if he had anything further to tell him, and although I was sure that Abner was going on to say something further when the servant entered, he replied now that he had not, and asked for the horses. The Judge went out to have the horses brought, and we remained in silence. My Uncle was calm, as with some consuming idea, but Storm was as nervous as a cat. He was out of his chair when the door was closed, and hopping about the room looking at the law books standing on the shelves in their leather covers. Suddenly he stopped and plucked out a little volume. He whipped through it with his forefinger, smothered a great oath, and shot it into his pocket, then he crooked his finger to my Uncle, and they talked together in a recess of the window until the Judge returned.

We rode away. I was sure that they intended to say something to the Judge in the woman's favor, for, guilty or not, it was a fine thing she had done to stand up and confess. But something in the interview had changed their purpose. Perhaps when they had heard the Judge's comment they saw it would be of no use. They talked closely together as they rode, but they kept before me and I could not hear. It was of the woman they spoke, however, for I caught a fragment.

"But where is the motive?" said Storm.

And my Uncle answered, "In the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Kings."

We were early at the county seat, and it was a good thing for us, because the court-room was crowded to the doors. My Uncle had got a big record book out of the county clerk's office as he came in, and I was glad of it,

for he gave it to me to sit on, and it raised me up so I could see. Storm was there, too, and, in fact, every man of any standing in the country.

The sheriff opened the court, the prisoners were brought in, and the Judge took his seat on the bench. He looked haggard like a man who had not slept, as, in fact, one could hardly have done who had so cruel a duty before him. Here was every human feeling pressing to save a woman, and the law to hang her. But for all his hag-ridden face, when he came to act, the man was adamant.

He ordered the confession read, and directed the girl to stand up. Taylor tried again to protest, but he was forced down into his chair. The girl stood up bravely, but she was white as plaster, and her eyes dilated. She was asked if she still adhered to the confession and understood the consequences of it, and, although she trembled from head to toe, she spoke out distinctly. There was a moment of silence and the Judge was about to speak, when another voice filled the court-room. I turned about on my book to find my head against my Uncle Abner's legs.

"I challenge the confession!" he said.

The whole court-room moved. Every eye was on the two tragic figures standing up: the slim, pale girl and the big, somber figure of my Uncle. The Judge was astounded.

"On what ground?" he said.

"On the ground," replied my Uncle, "that the confession is a lie!"

One could have heard a pin fall anywhere in the whole room. The girl caught her breath in a little gasp, and the prisoner, Taylor, half rose and then sat down as though his knees were too weak to bear him. The Judge's mouth opened, but for a moment or two he did not speak, and I could understand his amazement. Here was Abner assailing a confession which he himself had supported before the Judge, and speaking for the innocence of a woman whom he himself had shown to be guilty and taking one position privately, and another publicly. What did the man mean? And I was not surprised that the Judge's voice was stern when he spoke.

"This is irregular," he said. "It may be that this woman killed Marsh, or it may be that Taylor killed him, and there is some collusion between these persons, as you appear to suggest. And you may know something to throw light on the matter, or you may not. However that may be, this is not the time for me to hear you. You will have ample opportunity to speak when I come to try the case."

"But you will never try this case!" said Abner.

I cannot undertake to describe the desperate interest that lay on the people in the courtroom. They were breathlessly silent; one could hear the voices from the village outside, and the sounds of men and horses that came up through the open windows. No one knew what hidden thing Abner drove at. But he was a man who meant what he said, and the people knew it.

The Judge turned on him with a terrible face.

"What do you mean?" he said.

"I mean," replied Abner, and it was in his deep, hard voice, "that you must come down from the bench."

The Judge was in a heat of fury.

"You are in contempt," he roared. "I order your arrest. Sheriff!" he called.

But Abner did not move. He looked the man calmly in the face.

"You threaten me," he said, "but God Almighty threatens you." And he turned about to the audience. "The authority of the law," he said, "is in the hands of the electors of this county. Will they stand up?"

I shall never forget what happened then, for I have never in my life seen anything so deliberate and impressive. Slowly, in silence, and without passion, as though they were in a church of God, men began to get up in the courtroom.

Randolph was the first. He was a justice of the peace, vain and pompous, proud of the abilities of an ancestry that he did not inherit. And his superficialities were the annoyance of my Uncle Abner's life. But whatever I may have to say of him hereafter I want to say this thing of

him here, that his bigotry and his vanities were builded on the foundations of a man. He stood up as though he stood alone, with no glance about him to see what other men would do, and he faced the Judge calmly above his great black stock. And I learned then that a man may be a blusterer and a lion.

Hiram Arnold got up, and Rockford, and Armstrong, and Aikire, and Coopman, and Monroe, and Elnathan Stone, and my father, Lewis, and Dayton and Ward, and Madison from beyond the mountains. And it seemed to me that the very hills and valleys were standing up.

It was a strange and instructive thing to see. The loud-mouthed and the reckless were in that courtroom, men who would have shouted in a political convention, or run howling with a mob, but they were not the persons who stood up when Abner called upon the authority of the people to appear. Men rose whom one would not have looked to see—the blacksmith, the saddler, and old Asa Divers. And I saw that law and order and all the structure that civilization had builded up, rested on the sense of justice that certain men carried in their breasts, and that those who possessed it not, in the crisis of necessity, did not count.

Father Donovan stood up; he had a little flock beyond the valley river, and he was as poor, and almost as humble as his Master, but he was not afraid; and Bronson, who preached Calvin, and Adam Rider, who traveled a Methodist circuit. No one of them believed in what the other taught; but they all believed in justice, and when the line was drawn, there was but one side for them all.

The last man up was Nathaniel Davisson, but the reason was that he was very old, and he had to wait for his sons to help him. He had been time and again in the Assembly of Virginia, at a time when only a gentleman and landowner could sit there. He was a just man, and honorable and unafraid.

The Judge, his face purple, made a desperate effort to enforce his authority. He pounded on his desk and or-

dered the sheriff to clear the courtroom. But the sheriff remained standing apart. He did not lack for courage, and I think he would have faced the people if his duty had been that way. His attitude was firm, and one could mark no uncertainty upon him, but he took no step to obey what the Judge commanded.

The Judge cried out at him in a terrible voice.

"I am the representative of the law here. Go on!"

The sheriff was a plain man, and unacquainted with the nice expressions of Mr. Jefferson, but his answer could not have been better if that gentleman had written it out for him.

"I would obey the representative of the law," he said, "if I were not in the presence of the law itself!"

The Judge rose. "This is revolution," he said; "I will send to the Governor for the militia."

It was Nathaniel Davisson who spoke then. He was very old and the tremors of dissolution were on him, but his voice was steady.

"Sit down, your Honor," he said, "there is no revolution here, and you do not require troops to support your authority. We are here to support it if it ought to be lawfully enforced. But the people have elevated you to the Bench because they believed in your integrity, and if they have been mistaken they would know it." He paused, as though to collect his strength, and then went on. "The presumptions of right are all with your Honor. You administer the law upon our authority and we stand behind you. Be assured that we will not suffer our authority to be insulted in your person." His voice grew deep and resolute. "It is a grave thing to call us up against you, and not lightly, nor for a trivial reason shall any man dare to do it." Then he turned about. "Now, Abner," he said, "what is this thing?"

Young as I was, I felt that the old man spoke for the people standing in the courtroom, with their voice and their authority, and I began to fear that the measure which my Uncle had taken was high-handed. But he stood there like the shadow of a great rock.

"I charge him," he said, "with the murder of Elihu Marsh! And I call upon him to vacate the Bench."

When I think about this extraordinary event now, I wonder at the calmness with which Simon Kilrail met this blow, until I reflect that he had seen it on its way, and had got ready to meet it. But even with that preparation, it took a man of iron nerve to face an assault like that and keep every muscle in its place. He had tried violence and had failed with it, and he had recourse now to the attitudes and mannerisms of a judicial dignity. He sat with his elbows on the table, and his clenched fingers propping up his jaw. He looked coldly at Abner, but he did not speak, and there was silence until Nathaniel Davisson spoke for him. His face and his voice were like iron.

"No, Abner," he said, "he shall not vacate the Bench for that, nor upon the accusation of any man. We will have your proofs, if you please."

The Judge turned his cold face from Abner to Nathaniel Davisson, and then he looked over the men standing in the courtroom.

"I am not going to remain here," he said, "to be tried by a mob, upon the *viva voce* indictment of a bystander. You may nullify your court, if you like, and suspend the forms of law for yourselves, but you cannot nullify the constitution of Virginia, nor suspend my right as a citizen of that commonwealth."

"And now," he said, rising, "if you will kindly make way, I will vacate this courtroom, which your violence has converted into a chamber of sedition."

The man spoke in a cold, even voice, and I thought he had presented a difficulty that could not be met. How could these men before him undertake to keep the peace of this frontier, and force its lawless elements to submit to the forms of law for trial, and deny any letter of those formalities to this man? Was the grand jury, and the formal indictment, and all the right and privilege of an orderly procedure for one, and not for another?

It was Nathaniel Davisson who met this dangerous problem.

"We are not concerned," he said, "at this moment with your rights as a citizen; the rights of private citizenship are inviolate, and they remain to you, when you return to it. But you are not a private citizen. You are our agent. We have selected you to administer the law for us, and your right to act has been challenged. Well, as the authority behind you, we appear and would know the reason."

The Judge retained his imperturbable calm.

"Do you hold me a prisoner here?" he said.

"We hold you an official in your office," replied Davisson, "not only do we refuse to permit you to leave the courtroom, but we refuse to permit you to leave the Bench. This court shall remain as we have set it up until it is our will to readjust it. And it shall not be changed at the pleasure or demand of any man but by us only, and for a sufficient cause shown to us."

And again I was anxious for my Uncle, for I saw how grave a thing it was to interfere with the authority of the people as manifested in the forms and agencies of the law. Abner must be very sure of the ground under him.

And he was sure. He spoke now, with no introductory expressions, but directly and in the simplest words.

"These two persons," he said, indicating Taylor and the girl, "have each been willing to die in order to save the other. Neither is guilty of this crime. Taylor has kept silent, and the girl has lied, to the same end. This is the truth: There was a lovers' quarrel, and Taylor left the country precisely as he told us, except the motive, which he would not tell lest the girl be involved. And the woman, to save him, confesses to a crime that she did not commit.

"Who did commit it?" He paused and included Storm with a gesture. "We suspected this woman because Marsh had been killed by poison in his bread, and afterwards mutilated with a shot. Yesterday we rode out with the Judge to put those facts before him." Again he paused. "An incident occurring in that interview indicated that

we were wrong; a second incident assured us, and still later, a third convinced us. These incidents were, first, that the Judge's watch had run down; second, that we found in his library a book with all the leaves in it uncut, except at one certain page; and, third, that we found in the county clerk's office an unindexed record in an old deed book." There was deep quiet and he went on:

"In addition to the theory of Taylor's guilt or this woman's, there was still a third; but it had only a single incident to support it, and we feared to suggest it until the others had been explained. This theory was that some one, to benefit by Marsh's death, had planned to kill him in such a manner as to throw suspicion on this woman who baked his bread, and finding Taylor gone, and the gun above the mantel, yielded to an afterthought to create a further false evidence. It was overdone!

"The trigger guard of the gun in the recoil caught in the chain of the assassin's watch and jerked it out of his pocket; he replaced the watch, but not the key which fell to the floor, and which I picked up beside the body of the dead man."

Abner turned toward the judge.

"And so," he said, "I charge Simon Kilrail with this murder; because the key winds his watch; because the record in the old deed book is a conveyance by the heirs of Marsh's lands to him at the life tenant's death; and because the book we found in his library is a book on poisons with the leaves uncut, except at the very page describing that identical poison with which Elihu Marsh was murdered."

The strained silence that followed Abner's words was broken by a voice that thundered in the courtroom. It was Randolph's.

"Come down!" he said.

And this time Nathaniel Davisson was silent.

The Judge got slowly on his feet, a resolution was forming in his face, and it advanced swiftly.

"I will give you my answer in a moment," he said.

Then he turned about and went into his room behind

the Bench. There was but one door, and that opening into the court, and the people waited.

The windows were open and we could see the green fields, and the sun, and the far-off mountains, and the peace and quiet and serenity of autumn entered. The Judge did not appear. Presently there was the sound of a shot from behind the closed door. The sheriff threw it open, and upon the floor, sprawling in a smear of blood, lay Simon Kilrail, with a dueling pistol in his hand.

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

THE PROBLEM OF THE FIVE MARKS

I TRAVELED up to Ostend with Monsieur Jonquelle, the Prefect of Police.

There was never one seeking a solution of a mystery who was left so wholly in the dark. My father had sent me over from America, but I came under sealed orders. I think his motive was more to test me a little in the world than to put me into a problem with the *Service de la Sûreté*—that detective department of the great police system of France.

I did not know there was a mystery in the affair until I came with my sealed orders to Monsieur Jonquelle.

I knew, of course, that my great-aunt was dead and that there were complications of some sort; but there were always complications, I imagined, in the settlement of estates in a foreign country. Still, if I had reflected, I might have seen something significant in the fact that I was sent to the *Service de la Sûreté* instead of a banking house or a solicitor. My father was at the head of a financial house of some importance in the world; he would make no mistake.

Monsieur Jonquelle smiled when he read my sealed orders:

"And so I am not to leave you to the depravity of Paris!"

He looked sharply at me. And then his expression changed. He seemed to fall into reflection, fingering the cord of his monocle, his eyes vaguely on me.

Had I perhaps seen the "Review of Toy Land" at the *Folies Bergères?*

(From "Monsieur Jonquelle: Prefect of Police of Paris," by Melville Davisson Post. Copyright, 1923, by D. Appleton and Company, New York.)

I had not.

"I shall put you down, Sir Galahad," he said, "in the city of Ostend, while I look about a bit in Belgium. You will require to be hardened by adventures."

I slept that night at the Hotel Lotti and journeyed on the following day to Ostend. I learned little at the *Service de la Sûreté,* but I learned enough to know that my great-aunt's death was involved in something puzzling. She was unmarried, rich, eccentric, and almost unknown to us. I asked Monsieur Jonquelle how she died.

He looked me over as one might look over an infant at a prize show and then he answered I would be too young to understand that!

Too young to understand what had killed my aunt! I, who had a degree from Harvard and was about to enter my father's business!

I tried with a certain dignity to break through the man's facetious manner. Would he kindly tell me how my aunt had died? Why, certainly he would tell me: she had been killed, and he was searching France for her assassin. But I must not get the conception of an Apache with a knife. She had suffered from no act of violence, no hand had touched her; there had not even been a will to death on the part of her assassins. And yet she had been killed. And he, and every intelligence of the *Service de la Sûreté,* labored to find a solution of the problem.

In Ostend adventure awaited me!

It was there in the group of hurrying people, as I got down from the car a step behind Monsieur Jonquelle; a girl's face caught for an instant and then lost in the crowd.

But her face and the manner in which she had regarded me remained.

It was a lovely oval face under a mass of abundant straw-colored hair, and with great blue eyes. But the lure was in something more than this exquisite face. It was in the expression that changed as by some enchantment in the moment that I had a vision of her; that expression, anxious and disturbed—startled—like a frightened wild thing when I caught it first in the swaying crowd, changed

as it regarded me; an immense surprise, then a sort of wonder, and then some light as of a sudden daring purpose appeared, luminous as with a sort of deviltry.

I said nothing to Monsieur Jonquelle but I followed him to the Maison Blanc with a certain sense of interest.

I would find that face. Easily I shall find her, was the belief I held; and easily I found her, was the fact that followed.

Monsieur Jonquelle had departed on the Brussels road and I sat over my breakfast in the dining room that looks out on the long narrow street that runs landward through the city of Ostend from the Digue de Mer. It is a cobbled paved street of shops and little markets and there was a busy moving of peasant figures in it: baggy-trousered fishermen shuffling in their wooden shoes and Flanders women in their native dress, picturesque and vivid.

I watched the mass movement in the long street for some time before I got down to the details in it. Then I noticed a big, sturdy dog harnessed to a little cart standing in the street below my window, beside a small grocer's shop.

I got my hat and stick and sauntered out. It was a heavenly day, with a soft air from the Channel and a brilliant sun. As I came out, the door of the grocer's shop opened and the girl I was setting out to seek was there, in the sun, before me. She looked like a heavenly doll in her peasant dress.

She smiled when she saw me, the corners of her mouth dimpling; and she spoke to me in a queer lisping sort of foreign English:

"Monsieur is an American?"

"Yes."

"How nice!"

The sympathy, the frank admiration in the words were adorable. I felt before her smile in that moment that no gift of God could equal being an American.

"You came last night from Paris . . . with the father?"

She held up the warning finger of a little, white, doubled hand. "I saw . . . does the father perhaps observe us?"

I laughed, and added the explanation. The man was not my father. He was Monsieur Jonquelle, the Prefect of Police of Paris. And he did not, perhaps, observe us! He had gone on to Brussels. She was glad he had gone on. Why did I, "so nice," travel about with a Prefect of Police?

I explained that he was concerned with some affair of his trade in Paris that took him on to Brussels; I came to idle and amuse myself in Ostend.

She looked about her in the street with a troubled air. Leopold, her dog that drew the cart, was getting old, and like a man in years, would have his way. He was all right on the great road but he was quarrelsome in a crowded street. She had been waiting for the people to finish their morning affairs and leave her an empty way for him. But the street grew only the more densely crowded and she must go. Would I help her to the great road?

I would have helped her to the world's end!

And on either side, at the dog's muzzle, we threaded our way carefully through the long street across the environs of Ostend to the wide road that runs behind the sand dunes through the flat fields to the north.

She prattled like a child at every step with all the simplicity and curious interest of a child; a thousand questions that trod upon one another's heels and hardly waited for an answer—like some friendly tot by a peasant's fireside who asks about one's intimate and reserved affairs and discloses in return the names and habits of the barn fowl.

When we reached the great road, she tucked herself into the tiny cart and bade me adieu. And before I could realize what had happened she was gone. She smiled back at me and called something which I did not hear. The dog hurried and the tiny cart drew away rapidly on the long road toward the north.

It was all so like a fairy story that I remained motionless in the road.

I returned to the Maison Blanc, but it was for luncheon only and a brief reflection; what I would do was already

determined. I would search that road to the north. I set out on foot. One has more leisure to observe when one goes alone with a stick in one's hand.

I found fields about me separated by wide ditches, then the thin line of a village extended along the road. And beyond that the road divided. The sun was half down the sky as I turned back. I was approaching the village when that fortune of events that seemed to attend me extended an unexpected favor, as I passed a little house surrounded by a wall with a white door opening on the road.

As I drew near, within a dozen paces of the door, some one flung this door violently open and rushed out, nearly falling in her haste. It was the girl I sought, and with two mighty strides I caught her. She turned like a wild thing in my arms and then, when she saw who it was, with a little gasp relaxed.

"Oh!" she murmured, "it is you; did the good God send you?"

For a moment she went all limp in my arms, trembling; then she sprang up, clutched my hand and took me with her through the door, and directly into the cottage.

The door from the path opened into a room that the girl evidently maintained for herself, and beyond it in the one adjoining, in a chair beside a window, sat a big old man, his hands supported by the wide arms of the chair and his great bald head fallen forward. I thought for a moment that he was dead. But when I put my hand on him the pulse beat in his temples and his hands were warm, and in a moment his eyelids slowly opened, and I saw that the man was alive and conscious.

The girl, who had followed at my elbow, drew me gently away through the door. She bade me wait until she should return; and went back into the room, closing the door behind her.

This was no peasant's room. It was bright with chintz. The little women's things about in it showed taste and delicacy. Even a certain luxury of life was indicated. And in the leisure I had time to observe the place. There was a prim little garden outside inclosed by the white

wall, and in a corner of it stood the cart and the dog harness; the great dog slept on a bed of dried grass and leaves. It was a peasant cottage, but improved and livable, made charming in fact.

I was in this mood of wonder when the girl entered with a tray, a teakettle, and some dainty porcelain cups. She was composed now and smiling, but her face was white. She arranged the tea things on a little inlaid folding table and drew up a chair for me. Then, while the water boiled, she cleared the mystery with which we were environed.

Her father was a paralytic, growing with each day more helpless. His collapse this afternoon she had taken for the end, and in her terror she had rushed out to find some aid; by the favor of the good God I was passing at the moment. They were not, as I must have realized, native to Belgium. They were Russian. Her father was a savant, and a philologist, an antiquarian at the head of the Czar's great museum in Petrograd. They had escaped here. And to go unnoticed she had assumed this peasant's dress; also, there must be a way to carry their supplies here from the markets, and so came the dog and cart.

And now disaster enveloped her!

Her great blue eyes filled, and her soft adorable voice became unsteady. They had no longer any money, and this affliction that had fallen so swiftly on her father left her with no one to whom she could go for counsel.

Could she trust me; would I be a friend to her? She must have some one to advise with; would I maintain her confidence?

There could have been no doubt of me. I would have given her my inheritance. I had far more in my letter of credit than I could need. I would draw it out at the bank to-morrow.

She only shook her heavenly head at me and put out her hands with a little gesture.

No, no, she could not take anything from me. She did not mean that; what she meant was would I be a friend

to her? Would I respect her confidence? Could she trust me?

She stood up, released her hand that I had imprisoned in the fervor of my assurance, and removed the tea things from the table. She took them out and returned with some sheets of paper.

There must have been a dozen sheets, all blank except for some scrawling marks in pencil that looked like the pothooks made by school children in their first copy-books.

Her father had brought with him out of Russia a little packet containing a present from the Czar, she said. It was of great value and meant their fortune when their store of money was exhausted. He was fearful for the safety of the thing and had hidden it in Paris, somewhere in the house of the Prince Kitzenzof, their friend, with whom they had stopped after their escape from Russia. She had not thought much about it until this sudden paralysis had seized her father. Then he could not tell her where it was hidden. He was able to speak when she first asked him, but she could not understand. He spoke either some ancient language or his words were babble. But he seemed to understand what she was saying, and to endeavor to reply.

Then, because he could still move his hands, it had occurred to her to have him write the secret, and she had put a pencil in his fingers and a pad of paper on his chair arm, and he had made these pothooks. Over and over again and always in the same strange fashion he had made the same strange marks.

As I have written, they looked to me like the first efforts of a child to form the curves and angles of letters in a copy-book. But the girl, beside me, pointed out some peculiar details.

The paralytic had made always precisely the same number of these marks on every sheet that had been put before him; there were always *five* of these marks; they were always precisely the same with no variation, and they were always in precisely the same relative position to one

another. There was always a line drawn under them across the page, and below this line at about the middle of it there was an "x."

The girl had thought the thing all out and her comments were intelligent; in her simple way she had followed the very methods of learned men who undertake to decipher an inscription. She gave her conclusion:

The marks were not unmeaning scrawls, because they never varied in form; the mere incoherent efforts of a paralytic to form letters would not have this exactness. Therefore she concluded that each of these marks meant something definite.

Then these characters were always placed in the same order and on a line; therefore they were related in that order in their meaning—if they had a meaning. Her father had always apparently understood her question to him, and seemed concerned to give her a direction. The "x" under the line, the point of his pencil always dwelt on, and returned to, as though he wished her particularly to mark it; as though it, in the whole writing, was the important sign.

Her deep interest might, indeed, influence her conclusions, but she thought that these characters contained a definite direction about the packet, and that the "x" indicated the point at which it was concealed, in some relation to the message above the line in this mysterious cipher. She thought that if she could understand these strange marks she would be told where the thing was that she sought, and how to find it.

But she could not understand them.

They did not resemble any letters of any alphabet with which she was familiar. True, she knew only such modern languages as a girl was taught in Petrograd—French, Italian, English, and her native one. But her father was a great philologist. He would know innumerable languages. Could it be that he had written here in some one of the old dead languages to which his life had been given up? He was always deciphering inscriptions in these dead dialects at the Czar's museum.

She had thought about it.

Might it happen that this paralysis had left some portion of his mind uninjured—some portion dealing with old things—and benumbed the rest?

I caught at the suggestion: why, yes, that was a thing we had been taught in lectures. It was called *aphasia,* and there were many cases; men stricken with it forgot their names and history and their language, and had to learn to write again like a child; there was a case of one who could write only in the Greek script after he was so stricken, and another who knew only Latin.

"The thing is simple," I said. "We require only a direction to some archeologist. I will ask Monsieur Jonquelle."

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, "not Monsieur Jonquelle, not the police!"

That would ruin everything. The police would find the thing and keep it. It would be seized and confiscated. It had been carried into France concealed. There had been no declaration at the customs. Monsieur Jonquelle was the very last person who should know.

Let her think a moment! And she walked about in her perturbation, her face tense, her fingers moving.

"I know," she said, "the very thing to do . . . the very thing!"

There was a book shop on the street where I had found her with the dog, a dingy place with a clutter of old books. And now that she remembered there was a big English book with a leather back; a sort of lexicon, she thought, that had a lot of ancient alphabets grouped in columns on one page. I might go in there and see if these strange marks resembled the letters of any alphabet.

I would know the very page. One day, when her father was poring over it, she had put her thumb on the margin; it was soiled with the dust of the shop and left a print. I would be able to see that very mark there.

She was now alive and vital with an eager interest. And she literally put me out of the cottage into the road. I must go now at once.

I set out for Ostend as upon some high adventure.

As I approached the village a tall man seated on a stone by the roadside got up and went on before me. I thought for a moment it was Monsieur Jonquelle; then I saw the peasant dress he wore. I tried to overtake him, but his stride was as long and as vigorous as my own and he kept his distance. He was still before me when I went into the book shop on the street in Ostend.

I found the book at once.

It was a copy of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary in some old edition. And a moment later I had the very page, headed: Ancient Alphabets: Comparative Table of Hieroglyphic and Alphabetic Characters. And on the margin was the little thumb print! These ancient alphabets were arranged in columns, as the girl had said, with the equivalent English letter in the last narrow column on the right.

For a little while I was confused by the mass of outlandish characters. Then suddenly, in the third column from the left, I saw a mark like one of those on the sheet of paper that I had brought with me, and unfolded here for a comparison. I ran up the column and found another and another—the whole five. They were characters of the Phœnician alphabet. There could be no doubt about them. They were here precisely as the paralytic had drawn them on his sheet of paper. I wrote down the equivalent English letter below each hieroglyphic.

And they spelled the word L I G H T !

I put the paper into my pocket, tipped the shopkeeper, and went to my dinner at the Maison Blanc. He gave me a sly wink as I departed:

"It is a cipher of the heart perhaps, that page. Mademoiselle comes, and then Monsieur!"

I found Monsieur Jonquelle at dinner. He talked without waiting for replies. Did I find adventures—distressed damsels and a quest of fleece? And could I bear it to remain a little? He must go back to Brussels. And then he spoke a word or two about my great-aunt, whom I was near forgetting. Long ago she had loved a Russian, a grand duke. He had been killed in a duel at Nice. But he

had given her, for he was incredibly rich, a wonderful *gage d'amour,* that in the end had caused her death.

He rose, made me a rather pretentious genuflection, and went out.

I took it for a marked favor of heaven; for I was burning to get back with my report. . . .

It was scarcely dusk. I hired a motor to take me to the village, where I got down, dismissed it and went on afoot, I passed the tall peasant at his place beyond the village, but he strolled away into the field as I approached.

The girl ran to open the door for me, and stood back with her arm behind her as though to bow me in. I had the sense of having passed through a door in the hill into some witch's cottage of a fairy land.

Her big eyes grew wider in a sort of amazed, vague wonder when I put the paper down on the table and explained what I had discovered.

She nestled down beside me on the arm of the chair in which I sat, and seemed to fall into reflection, *light—light.* What could her father mean by that cryptic word? Then she spoke slowly, as though she thought aloud.

"A window in Russia is called a 'light.' "

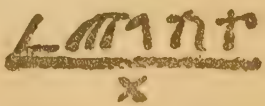
"Then he means a window," I said. "What window could he mean?"

She leaned forward until the mass of her straw-colored hair touched my face.

"It would be a window in Paris," she replied; "for the packet is hidden in Paris."

Then her voice caught vigor and went eagerly on:

"It would mean a window in the house on the Boulevard St. Germain, where we were living. . . . What window in that house? . . . Why, surely the window in my father's room there!"



She sprang up and whirled around the table like one of those exquisite spring-driven toys that the Swiss so excellently put together.

Why, of course, that was the reading of the riddle; the window in that room in that house in Paris.

Would I go to Paris in the morning and bring it to her?

I was not a suspect alien from that mad Russia all Europe feared. I would not be searched and registered, as she and her father had been searched and registered at every turning when their arrival in France was known; a matron at the Customs here had fingered every stitch of clothing on her, as though bombs from Moscow could be carried in the seam of a bodice.

The Prince's house was closed. He was now in England; for her father's health they had come here to the sea when their host departed. But I would have no difficulty. I could climb the wall if the gate was locked, a grating by the door could be lifted; the room was the first to the right on the first landing of the stairway; and there was only a single window in it. The house was 68 on the left hand as one faced down the Seine. I could not fail to find it.

Then she stopped, her face lifted.

But where, about the window, was it hidden? The query seemed only then to strike her.

And here I was able to add my quota of deduction. Was there not always a line drawn below the word with that mystic cross mark? That would mean *below* the window; and was not the "x" always precisely under the center of this line? That would mean at the center under the window.

She whirled off again into the doll dance, as at the releasing of the spring that held her. And I stood up. Nothing in all the world could have been so alluring. The dainty wooden shoes, that one could have put into one's waistcoat pocket, were noiseless on the floor, and the little fairy figure turned smiling, its arms extended. It was all beyond the resistance of any mortal man. As she passed beside me I gathered her up into my arms. . . .

I traveled on the morning train to Paris.

I had not seen Monsieur Jonquelle, but he met me as I stepped down from my compartment. He was suave and with that bit of acid in his voice. He had expected me on an earlier train; and I must pardon his lack of leisure. To-morrow he would see me—perhaps a little before that. . . . He thought I might be toughened now to the depravity of Paris.

I was so bewildered at the man's appearing thus, with such knowledge of my acts, that to cover it I put the only query I could think of. Had he discovered my great-aunt's assassin?

He laughed. Her assassins he had known from the very day. It was another thing that he was seeking to discover, and he had tethered out a kid to find it. . . . I had perhaps heard of that style of trapping cheetahs—to tether out a kid!

Then he made me a low, ironical, continental courtesy and walked away.

I followed precisely the girl's directions; took a motor to the Rue St. Père, dismissed it at that point and walked along the Boulevard St. Germain, until I found the house. Then I turned in behind it to a narrow street; a little way between two walls. The gate was not locked. I closed it behind me and crossed the garden to the door. To the right of this door was the old iron grating of which the fastenings had rusted out, and by which I could enter. But as I approached I noticed that this door was not quite closed. And so I pushed it open and went in.

I found the old marble stairway and ascended. The furniture in the house was covered. But it was evidently a splendid house; the house of some one old and rich. The friend of these exiles in Paris had been a grandee; but I thought, from his surroundings, of an effeminate and decadent taste. I found the room to the right at the first landing and went in. There before me was the single great window. The sun of the afternoon, filtered through the heavy curtains, made a sort of golden twilight. And

I paused for a moment, with my hand on the handle of the closed door.

The furnishings in this room were also covered. But I could see it was no man's apartment. It was the boudoir of a woman. It was mellow with age and in the refined taste of one long accustomed to the luxuries of life. The Russian who had received here the exiled savant and his daughter was a strange exotic thus to surround himself with this effeminacy.

But such reflections were of no concern.

I went over to the window. The casement board came up easily when I put the blade of my knife under it, and there, as though hastily thrust into concealment, was a necklace of great Oriental pearls.

I lifted it out and gathered it into my hands; it filled them—a fortune!

At this moment I heard a faint sound behind me. I turned, my fingers a mass of jewels.

Before the door, the heels of his boots together, stood Monsieur Jonquelle, his body in the act of that mocking genuflection.

"Ah, Monsieur!" he said, "how great a thing this love is! Blind and with the strength of Samson! It ejects the great-aunt out of life, and sends the nephew to the service of distressed damsels and paralyzed old men. But also it is blind! Hieroglyphics spelling out an English word for the direction of a Russian lady does not seem queer to him; and doors unlatched for his convenience in the heart of Paris. . . ."

His voice was oiled with vitriol.

"But I felicitate Monsieur. He has made a perfect bait about our wolf trap for the cheetahs, and he finds the necklace that the *Service de la Sûreté* could get no track of. . . . It was this necklace, Monsieur, that we were seeking; its purloiners have been always in the hollow of our hand . . . and Monsieur finds it for us, here in his great-aunt's house!"

I stammered in my profound amazement.

"My great-aunt's house!"

"Why, *certainement!*" He continued in his acid voice: "And in the very room in which she died, when she awoke to find the cherished gift of her long dead lover vanished!"

I stammered on:

"You mean . . . you mean . . . the Russian savant and his daughter robbed her!"

He put out his hands with a great gesture of rejection.

"Ah, no! How blind this love is! . . . The robbery was accomplished by old Dutocq, who used to be a concierge in the wing of Archeology at the Louvre, and the American actress, Greysmith, called 'Dolly Deep Dimple' in the 'Review of Toy Land.' "

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

THE INSPIRATION

"WILL there be a bobby to hear her scream, north of the Zambezi?"

There were two persons in the room.

It was a small room, looking out over St. James's Park, and attached to the library of the great London house. It was meant for the comfort of one who wished to withdraw from the library in order to examine some book at his leisure, or to make some annotation. There were a table, two comfortable chairs, and a painting, rather large for the room, representing an affair of honor on a snow-covered highway in the rear of a French column, presumably Napoleon's army in Russia.

The conversation between the two persons in the room, Lord Donald Muir and Walker, of the American Secret Service, had passed its preliminary stage.

The youth seated in one of the great chairs was a typical product of the aristocracy of England. He was little more than a boy, but he had already something of the reserve, the almost pretentious restraint, of his race. But he was not entirely within this discipline; an intensity of feeling broke out. It appeared now and then in a word, in an inflection of his voice, in a gesture.

He sat very straight in the chair, in his well-cut evening clothes—his gloves crushed together and gripped in a firm hand that could not remain idle under his intensity of feeling. He was a very good-looking boy, with a single startling feature, his eyebrows were straight and dark, while his hair, weathered by the outdoors, was straw-

(From "Walker of the Secret Service," by Melville Davisson Post. Copyright, 1924, by D. Appleton and Company, New York.)

colored. It gave his blue eyes at all times a somewhat tense expression.

Walker had come to London for a conference with the American Ambassador on the passport forgeries, and he had remained a guest at the Embassy ball. And when the Ambassador had asked him to hear the boy and help him if he could, he had gone with Lord Donald Muir into the little room beyond the great library.

The Ambassador had explained the matter. He had given him each detail; the girl's mother was American; she had married the Earl of Rexford; she was dead; Rexford was dead, and here was this dilemma. Walker knew each of the persons in this drama, especially Sir Henry Dercum, who had been in the English foreign service, and at one time attached to the Embassy in Washington.

Walker was standing, now, before a window, looking out into the night that enveloped London. The boy continued to speak.

"Will he not have the right to take her anywhere he likes?"

The Secret Service agent made a slight gesture, as of one rejecting a suggestion. The gesture was unconscious. The man was thinking of what Lord Donald Muir was saying to him.

"I suppose he has the right to take her anywhere he likes, provided he remains within the jurisdiction of the English law."

"Surely," replied the boy, "Dercum is a clever beast; he will keep within the jurisdiction of the English law."

Walker turned slightly, his face was outlined against the black square of the night framed in the window.

"Then why do you have this fear about it?" he said.

There came a sudden energy into Lord Muir's voice.

"That is all very well as a theory," he said, "but it is quite different in fact. . . . The English law runs in South Africa; that is the theory. It is a very fine theory, as it used to be lectured into us at the Hill—a great empire providing precisely the same measure of protection for its subject at the most distant point of its dominion that it

provided for him in the very capital itself. That is as nearly as I can remember it. It is a fine theory."

"It is a magnificent theory," replied the Secret Service agent, "and England has always endeavored to maintain it."

Lord Muir twisted his gloves; his brown hands gripped them.

"But England can't maintain it; that is the very thing I mean. What protection can the law of England give her in northwestern Rhodesia? The law of England will run there in theory, but it's Dercum's damned will that will run there in fact."

He gripped the gloves suddenly with both hands, as though he were about to destroy them.

"Will there be a bobby to hear her scream?"

He leaned forward in his intensity.

"And what will she be when she comes out? And she won't come out until Dercum's ready. I will tell you what she will be, she will be what Dercum intends her to be."

He looked at the Secret Service agent, his face covered with sweat. Then he continued:

"Do you think this fine English law will do her any good then?"

Walker came a step or two away from the window. He looked down at the boy. His face was composed, with that vague expression it always took on when his interest was very much awakened.

"Sir Henry Dercum," he said, "will have some instincts of a gentleman."

"If he has any instincts of a gentleman," replied the boy, with a sudden energy, "he has kept them so far concealed. London does not know about this man. I have had him looked up. He was unspeakable in Hongkong. No members of the English colony came down to the boat to see him off, although he did represent the empire. But he is a clever beast; one can't get at him.

"I wanted my solicitor to resist his confirmation as guardian, but he said I was not a party in interest."

The boy's voice was charged with an intense vigor.

"I wonder why the law is always so helpless about anything that is important. I had rather see her go to the devil than to Dercum. The devil has a reputation for what he is, and Dercum has a carefully built up reputation in London for what he is not—an explorer, with that sporting instinct that is dear to the English, and a gentleman, when the fact is, he is a crook, a thief when it comes to the accumulation of scientific data, and a bounder! But he is not a fool, and that's what makes him so damnably dangerous; he is infinitely clever."

Walker remained where he had been standing, looking down at the man in the chair, his face in its vague repose. The dilemma of Lord Donald Muir profoundly impressed him.

"I am very much puzzled about this matter," he said. "I cannot say that I trust Dercum, but I can say that I have no reason not to trust him. In fact, he has acted, the American Ambassador tells me, with extreme delicacy. The property which the girl takes from her mother lies in America. He has made no effort to exercise any control over it; he has, in fact, advised the Ambassador that he would be pleased to have the trustees of her mother's estate continue to administer this property until the girl comes of age to receive it. That did not sound like a man with a design.

"It was quite possible for him to obtain the sale of this property in America and the transfer of the funds into his custody under the Englash law, but he takes the other course. This does not seem precisely consistent with your estimate of the man."

There was a note as of a bitter laugh under Lord Muir's answer.

"It's precisely consistent with my estimate of him. What the brute's after is the girl; when he gets her, he will get everything with her. Why hurry? When Dercum has degraded her enough, he will get all the rest of it; he knows what he is doing."

The boy got up suddenly.

"And I can't stop him," he said, "unless I go and kill

him; and the beast is too clever to be killed except in the nastiest way. 'The duel has gone out with the lace coat,' he laughs at me with his little reptilian eyes under the heavy eyelids. 'Have a bit of patience, my boy; I have no objection to you, if you please my ward. But you must wait a little; she is quite young. It is admirable to be youthful and impetuous, but it makes life difficult for a guardian.' That's what he says. And I know what he thinks, and I know what he is going to do."

The Secret Service agent interrupted:

"What, precisely?"

"It will be just what I told you a moment ago," replied Lord Muir. "He is laying plans now; she's quite keen to get into any queer corner of the earth. It is easy enough to get a girl worked up, especially when she has a big legend of her father before her. He will do precisely what I have said, take her into South Africa."

He got up with sudden energy.

"The law can't stop him, but there must be something, and that's why I come to you, sir," he added.

"To me," said Walker, "—because you believe in providence?"

"Yes, sir," the boy continued, "that is precisely the reason I came to you. It is true that the American Ambassador has a point of attack with Dercum because of these American properties, but that is not the thing I depended upon. My uncle, when he was chief of the criminal investigation department of Scotland Yard, used to say when we had a perplexed thing to take up with America: 'We can unravel it, if Captain Walker comes up with one of his inspirations from heaven.' Well, sir, I have come to you for one of these inspirations."

Walker laughed softly. The reputation was perhaps his greatest asset—a sort of intuition arising at certain complicated stages of an affair, the sudden swift realization of some essential hitherto unobserved.

Walker continued to smile.

The young man was looking at him with a tense, serious expression.

"You will have one of these inspirations, Captain Walker?"

The Secret Service agent began to walk about the room. He was disturbed that Lord Donald Muir should come to him with this affair. It was not a thing in which he ought to take any part. Outside of some courteous discussion at the request of the American Ambassador, he did not see how it was possible for him to have anything to do with the matter. And further, it disturbed him that this youth should come depending upon what was to him the absurd phase of a detective reputation.

Scotland Yard called his sudden swift insight into some complicated matter, "the inspirations from heaven of the Chief of the American Secret Service," and not precisely with a complimentary accent. The thing annoyed him. But he smiled at the youth in the chair—that vague, placid smile for which the man was famous.

"I do not see what I can do, my dear Lord Muir," he said; "but I shall be receptive to any inspiration that may arrive. Let us go down."

They went out of the little room into the great library. It was a long, immense room, and the doors were closed. As they passed through, the music from below ascended, and the vast confusion of human voices, like the hum of some distant insect hive. Walker opened the door, and they were at once above an immense sea of human figures, gay, brilliant.

The crowded Embassy ball moved below them. The jewels, the gowns of women, the color of uniforms gave the thing the aspect of an almost barbaric saturnalia. The dense crowd overflowed onto the bronze stairway.

Lord Muir entered and was lost in the immense throng, seeking the one about whom he was so greatly concerned. The Chief of the American Secret Service went slowly down the stairway, moving his hand along the mahogany rail under which, in a magnificent frieze, a wood-nymph entangled in a flowering vine fled from the pursuit of satyrs. He was more disturbed than he had been willing to admit.

This girl was the daughter of that charming American woman who had married the Earl of Rexford.

Captain Walker had not cared greatly for the Earl of Rexford; he was too typically an Englishman, following conventions that seemed a trifle out of modern times; but he was compelled, in a measure, to admire him. While other men wasted their fortunes in the frivolities of London, this man had spent what he could get in exploration, in fitting out expeditions to discover unknown places of the earth. And he went with them, enduring the hardship and peril.

He had died in his greatest venture. The whole expedition had perished on one of the wind-swept plateaus of the Antarctic. It was Dercum who had gone in to find him, and he had found him frozen to death—the very dogs frozen, in one of those fearful depressions of temperature that sometimes descend in an immense blizzard on this wind-swept plateau.

From Dercum's report he had very nearly reached Rexford alive. The expedition had evidently held out for days against the blizzard. The Earl of Rexford had been the last man to go. In the snow hut, on the canvas table, was his diary, written up. Beside it, on the blank sheet, were a dozen paragraphs in which he had directed the appointment of Dercum as guardian for his minor daughter, with all custody and direction of his estate.

The Secret Service agent passed these things through his mind as he descended—the brilliant laughter, the murmur of voices below, making a swirl of noises. He remembered some of the details arising in the formal matter of Dercum's appointment after his return. A solicitor or some official authority had ventured a doubt about the handwriting on the page beside the last entry in the diary. But it was shown to him that the writing of innumerable pages of the diary varied, due to the cold or to the physical condition of the writer at the time.

The persons in Dercum's expedition, persons whose integrity could not be doubted, had been but a few minutes behind him in entering this snow hut in which the Earl

of Rexford had been found, and they had at once, at Dercum's direction, written their signatures at the bottom of the page.

The diary had been immediately authenticated. It could not have been afterward changed. And it was shown that these signatures, written in that immense cold by benumbed fingers, varied from the normal signatures of the individuals returning to their common environment of life. In fact, no one could have said who had written these signatures if the men who had written them that day, at Dercum's direction, in the snow hut on the canvas table, had not been present in England to establish the fact. The diary, the ink, the pen were there on the canvas table, and these men had established by their signatures the authenticity of this writing beyond question.

At this moment a tall man wearing a distinguished order passed the Chief of the American Secret Service.

"Sir," he said, "are you perhaps receiving an inspiration from heaven on our Hyde Park murders?"

Walker smiled.

"It would be my only hope," he said, "against the superior intelligence of Scotland Yard."

And he went on. He was annoyed by the incident. Would he never escape from this ridiculous pretension!

As he entered the crowd overflowing on the bottom of the stairway, he caught a glimpse of Sir Henry Dercum and the girl in an eddy beyond where the great newel post turned. Dercum's big shoulders would be anywhere conspicuous. He was a massive Englishman, with a wide, Oriental face, purpled by good feeding, and little reptilian eyes under heavy lids that very nearly obscured them. The man had a habit of lifting his head when he was very much concerned, as though to get a better view of his subject without the effort or the danger of raising his eyelids.

The girl before him was in the splendid lure of youth; her dark hair was lifted, by some subtlety of the coiffeur's art, into a beautiful, soft background for her face; her dark eyes and her delicate skin were exquisitely brought

out by it. She was in the first bud of life, and she was very lovely. But there was more than mere physical beauty; there was the charm of inexperience, the charm of adventurous youth that does not question, and, like charity, believeth all things—that inexperience which is gayly ready for any adventure into what it beautifully imagines to be a fairy world.

The Secret Service agent saw the expression bedded into Dercum's heavy face, and he knew what it meant. He heard also the sentence he was speaking.

"You will need a bit of change from all this artificiality."

"Do I look stale so soon, Sir Henry?"

The girl laughed.

His eyes traveled over her, his head thrown back in a slow, heavy-lidded expression as though it were a physical caress.

"Ah, no," he said; "but you will have inherited some of your father's interest in the waste places of the earth. How would you like to go with me and find a lost river?"

"I should love it," she said. "Where is your lost river, Sir Henry?"

He looked about him.

"Let us find a seat somewhere," he said, "and I will show you a map."

They got out of the crowd, traversed the long hall that runs parallel to St. James's Park, and entered the conservatory.

Walker followed. Dercum's words had almost the sting of a blow. It was the verification of Lord Donald Muir's anxiety. If love were blind, Walker reflected, it had surely the intuition of the saints. Dercum's plan, the plan which Walker had considered academic and unlikely, was practical and on the way.

The Chief of the American Secret Service went on into the conservatory, through fringes of the gay crowd floating everywhere like gorgeous butterflies disentangled from the mass. He stopped beside an immense vase filled with Japanese chrysanthemums of a peculiar color, huge like a

shock of hair on an immense stem. They entirely obscured him, and he did not move.

It was not in any definite plan that he had entered the conservatory and stopped behind this mass of flowers. He had been surprised, shocked by the swift verification of this boy's fear, and he wished to reflect on it. It was not that he had followed to hear what Dercum said; the details of what he said would be now unimportant. It was the man's intention alone that mattered, and this intention required no further explanatory word.

He felt a sudden and desperate anxiety. This girl, lovely and inexperienced, was entirely at Dercum's will; as her guardian he would have exclusive control of her, and, with the man's cleverness, what he wished he would accomplish. The English law, having put the girl into his charge, would not concern itself about intentions that could not be established. It would concern itself only with the overt act, and when Dercum resorted to that he would be beyond a running of the King's writ.

Walker felt himself pressed for reflection, and he stopped here unmoving, without a plan. But as chance would have it, he stopped precisely at the place he would have selected if he had followed in determination to hear every word that Dercum was about to say. Sir Henry and the girl were just beyond him—beyond the screen of flowers, on a bench by the window. Their words, although under-uttered, came clearly to him; and in his vague reflection, the skill with which Dercum moved in his plan was conspicuously evident.

The man was getting the lure of a land of mystery into his story; he was deftly stimulating the girl's fancy; he was calling her interest in her father's adventures to his aid; he was making a wonder expedition out of this thing he had in mind. No element of thrill, or color, in this adventure was lacking.

Walker could almost see Dercum's finger on the map. But the map would be only a property of the thing he was staging. He did not explain precisely where this river lay, or the route to it. But on some golden afternoon they

would unship at a seaport, assemble a fantastic company and go into some lost country that would be like the Wood beyond the World, or the waste regions of some fairy kingdom. And they would go now, this very summer, when the London season had slacked a little.

Dercum was beginning to specify dates. Walker could not see him, but he knew that the bit of pencil moved on the map; he would arrange everything. From the few words of the girl, reaching him across the Japanese chrysanthemums, she was entranced. A butterfly entangled in illusions—she was ready to go, and she would go.

And with his clear vision, the vision not accustomed to be obscured by detail, the Chief of the American Secret Service saw that the thing could not be prevented. One could interfere with the custody of a guardian only with an established intent in an English court. This intent must be based on evidence, and there would be no evidence; there would not be even the knowledge that the thing was contemplated. With infinite cleverness Dercum had drawn the girl into a conspiracy of silence. They would arrange it; they would keep their own counsels, and they would go. It would have all the secret, alluring charm of a fairy adventure.

Walker heard the pledge of silence, and knew that they were coming out. He saw, also, looking down the long hall toward the drawing-room, Lord Donald Muir advancing in his search. He would be here in a moment; the three of them would meet, in a moment, just beyond where he stood behind the chrysanthemums. Already Dercum and the girl were very nearly up to him.

What would he do?

There was something surely to be done. The world behind its harsh, indifferent machinery must be controlled by some immense considerate impulse. All the operations of life could not be abandoned to a mere physical fatalism, to laws that were unthinking, or to a tendency that could not change. There must be something in the universe to interfere against the iniquity of human intentions and this indifference of nature! And suddenly, with a flash of

vision, Walker saw what had happened in Rexford's snow hut, on the plateau of the Antarctic, during the twenty minutes that Dercum had been there before his expedition had come up—he saw it as clearly as though he had been looking on.

He called to Lord Donald Muir, and he advanced to meet Dercum and the girl.

"Sir Henry," he said, "will you release these young people to the dance and walk a moment with me?"

Dercum lifted his big Oriental face, looking out under his heavy eyelids. He moved the tips of the girl's fingers to his lips, and he nodded to Muir.

"You will be a very brilliant couple," he said. "I shall be charmed to observe you."

And then he turned to the Chief of the American Secret Service.

"Ah, Walker," he said, "I have not seen you since the old days in Washington."

The Chief of the American Secret Service put his hand through Dercum's arm and drew him along beside him, down the hall, with an ease of manner as though he were the warm companion of a lifetime.

"My friend," he said, "I am going to ask you to release this guardianship and go on your expedition alone."

Dercum stopped suddenly, his body rigid.

"You have overheard," he said.

Walker smiled. He made a slight gesture.

"It is one of the perquisites of the Secret Service," he said. "You will grant my request, Sir Henry."

"Your request?" Dercum's voice was almost a stutter. "I grant it?"

The Chief of the American Secret Service took a firmer hold of his arm.

"Walk with me," he said; "we may be noticed. . . . Ah, yes, my friend, you will grant it."

"Why should I grant it, pray?" said the amazed Dercum.

"You will grant it," replied Walker, "because you will not wish to answer in the English courts—in the English

criminal courts—a question that has just occurred to me."

The Chief of the American Secret Service laughed; two persons connected with a Continental Embassy were regarding him. Then he went on:

"How did it happen, Sir Henry, that when you came on Lord Rexford's expedition on the Antarctic plateau, that morning, when you entered his snow hut some twenty minutes ahead of the other members of your expedition, and in that low temperature, in that deadly Antarctic temperature, you found everything frozen, the food, the very mercury in the thermometer, the bodies of the dead —how did it happen, Sir Henry"—and his hand moved on Dercum's arm like a caress—"how did it happen that the ink on the canvas table was not also frozen?"

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

THE PHANTOM WOMAN

Sir Henry Marquis, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, has a monograph on this case. He said we were accustomed to believe that the dead were impotent in human affairs; but it was a thing of which no man could be certain. How could we know whether the power of those gone out of sight and hearing, waxed or waned, or ceased; or by what means, or in what manner they might be able to move the living to their will.

He said this case profoundly impressed him.

We stopped in the pine woods to listen. The music seemed to fill the world; it was low and soft, a sort of vague elfin music appearing as by some enchantment.

There was this strange quality in it—that it seemed to emerge from the wood itself, to be a part of this aspect of nature, the filtered sunlight, the odor of the wood and the soft air from the sea. And it drugged the senses in us. One heard it and was transported to a kingdom of the fairy and all things about it took on the glamour of a dream.

I stopped beside Sir Henry Marquis on the path, behind us was the village and its inn where we had gone for luncheon at the end of our motor journey from London that morning. And before us, at the end of the path through the wood, was the house and below it the sea. It was a lovely artistic house that my father's wife had built here for this romantic marriage after my father's death;

(From "The Bradmoor Murder," by Melville Davisson Post. J. H. Sears & Company, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1929, by Melville Davisson Post.)

and now that she, too, was dead it remained in the possession of this Hungarian fiddler. When one considered the man alone, when one looked coolly at him, it was past belief that my step-mother should have been so infatuated with him. The Count Andreas was, merely to the eye, what I have written, a Hungarian fiddler. It must have been this music that had entranced the woman, for out of the spell of it she seemed to be also out of the spell of this strange creature. For when she lay dying in her London house she expressed the wish that a bracelet of Burma rubies in the Count's possession should be given to me. And when her solicitor pointed out that her oral wish could have no effect against the Count's resistance, she said, "I will return and make him do it!"

Count Andreas would make no reply to my solicitor. And so on the morning I went with Sir Henry Marquis, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, to this interview with him. The verities of justice were on my side, the rubies had come from my American mother, had been passed on by my father to his second wife, and now by operation of the English law this Hungarian fiddler took them. I felt crowded out of my inheritance by a combination of evil events. My father's wife had tried to return my mother's jewels to me and here by the running of this English law I was dispossessed.

I had gone from my solicitor to Sir Henry Marquis for he had known my mother in the old days, and remained a friend.

He had listened with rather a strange face, I thought, when I had related to him all the details of the matter.

"Sarah," he said, "you have your mother's eyes and that lovely line of the hair around the forehead."

Then he had got up and walked about the room.

"We shall go down and see this Count Andreas. I know something of him."

And so we had come down, on this August morning, where the great moors lay above the sea fringed along their edges by the pine trees. It was a lovely prospect in the sun; the bracken of the wild moors, the wood along

their face when they fell sheer into the sea, and the sea itself with its great colored patches lying below the blue water as though it were on a painted floor.

We could see the grass terrace before the house; for the house stood on a shelf of the moor—a space had been cut out of the pine woods for it—and this green terrace flanked by the wood on either side and the house behind looked down on the sea. It was two hundred feet above but one could have cast a stone into the water. The brow of the moor here dropped like a plummet into the ocean. The music came from the terrace. We could see a man, walking about on it, a violin at his shoulder, his bow hand flying. And in the glamour of the melodies he was a sylvan creature. One held the breath to see him, and ventured softly lest he vanish. . . . I saw how the hypnotic virtues of this music had entranced my father's wife, especially when she felt alone and with age before her. The man when he played was within the music as in a golden haze . . . but when he stepped out of it he was the Hungarian fiddler.

He stepped out of it as we came up, but he was a very clever person, carefully dressed and with a suave demeanor.

"It is Sir Henry Marquis," he said, "and Miss Sarah Whitney. I am honored."

Then he spoke directly to Sir Henry Marquis.

"You arrive quickly. My telegram to Scotland Yard could not have reached London before an hour of noon."

I caught the fleeting evidence of surprise in Sir Henry's face but there was no surprise in his voice or manner. He had not journeyed here at the call of any telegram from the Count to Scotland Yard; but his profession was not one permitting of surprises. The situation before Sir Henry, I thought was difficult. And I wondered what Delphic answer he could make.

"What are the details of this matter?" he said.

It was a key that would fit any lock.

The Count put his violin down carefully on a stone seat and went with us toward a window on the first floor of the

house on the farther side. The house sat parallel with the terrace in its longest direction; there was a hall in the center and a stairway going up and on one side the drawing-room with the dining room on the opposite side across the hall. It was not a large house but it was beautifully designed and its furnishings were artistic.

But Count Andreas did not go on directly to the window. He stopped.

"It was all very cleverly done," he said, "there was no sound. . . . I am puzzled to know if the woman was alone, or had an accomplice."

Sir Henry put a query then.

"Were *you* alone in the house?"

Again it was a key for any lock for he did not know what was before him and whether it had happened in the night or day, or in fact what it was in which a woman had been concerned.

Count Andreas made a vague gesture.

"I am very careless," he said. "I sleep here alone, the servants come out from the village of a morning, but I have no fear."

Sir Henry made a rather strange reply.

"It is very dangerous," he said, "to have no fear."

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not a practical man," he said, "or else I would have taken my wife's jewels to London and a bank vault; but I wished her room in this house to remain as she left it . . . nothing has been changed or moved in it, the dust, and the spiders have their way. . . . I had forgotten that her jewels remained in a little drawer of her writing table.

Then he turned quickly about to me; as though some sharp amazing thing had suddenly occurred to him.

"Alas! Miss Sarah," he cried. "You will be a loser with me; for the ruby bracelet about which you wrote me is gone with the other jewels."

The words were like a blow to me, for I had hoped to recover this heirloom of my mother—this bracelet of rubies set in a gold work that hinged between the stones.

It was of great value and had been in my mother's family for a hundred years.

I suppose I must have looked the despair I felt, and I could not keep back a mist of tears.

Sir Henry touched me gently.

"Perhaps we shall find it," he said—and he went on behind the Hungarian who had faced about after the delivery of his blow. He also hoped that the jewels would be recovered, he said. No doubt Sir Henry Marquis would find them. Scotland Yard was so wonderful and wise. It was marked fulsome flattery, but it had in it I thought a note of the praise of the prophet for the accomplishments of Baal. I fear that I was a rather pathetic figure as I came on behind them. Sir Henry Marquis did not put any query; he followed the man to the window. The Count directed Sir Henry's attention first to the window and after that to the flower bed below it.

"Here," he said, "the thief entered; the bolt fastening the window was probably turned from the inside, or by collusion with one of the servants. You will observe that when the window is unfastened the knob stands perpendicular, in precisely the same position as when it is closed, so no one would notice that it was unfastened."

He paused a moment.

"I say she, Sir Henry, because you will see that it was a woman; a woman about the size of Miss Whitney. There are her tracks quite clearly marked in the soft earth of this flower bed below the window."

And there were the tracks, indeed to be seen where the woman had stood before the window while she had carefully pushed the swinging window that opened the house to her.

Sir Henry examined these footprints.

"The lady," he said, "has been very considerate of us. These faint footprints are in the very best position on this soft earth to remain clear."

Then he turned to Count Andreas.

"But why do you say 'a woman about the size of Miss Whitney'?"

The man hesitated as though puzzled to find a reply, then he gave the reason.

"I was thinking of my wife's maids," he said; "they have been all women of about Miss Whitney's size; and this robbery will be the work of some one familiar with the house."

"On the contrary," replied Sir Henry. "these footprints were made by a thin woman—Miss Whitney will weigh nine stone—an *incredibly* thin woman."

The Count was astonished.

"Look at the print," he said. "These footprints might have been made by Miss Sarah Whitney."

Sir Henry turned to me.

"Quite so," he said; "the prints here might have been made by Miss Whitney's slipper if there was no such thing as gravity." Then he addressed me directly. "Sarah," he said, "will you kindly walk from the flag-path of the terrace to this window and stand a moment before it."

I did as he directed, although I was puzzled to understand what it meant; was I perhaps to be indicted as the thief?

Count Andreas cried out in confirmation of Sir Henry.

"You see the prints are almost identical."

"Ah, so!" replied Sir Henry. "But you fail to note the important feature. You will observe that the heel of Miss Whitney's slipper sank into the turf on her way from the flag path and here in the flower bed it makes a deep footprint. While the heel of this other woman's shoe cannot be seen on the turf which she must have crossed from the path and here in the flower bed where she stood the footprints are clear but faint . . . these evidences could mean only one thing—an absence of *weight!*"

Then he stooped suddenly over as though to look closely at the footprints, but he was looking rather, I thought, at the grass beside the flower bed; it appeared, even to my unpracticed eye, pressed over, faintly, as though something long and heavy, and of some bulk had been put down there.

But he made no comment and presently turned to Count Andreas. His face strange.

"Gravity has been negatived here," he said. "This will be a sort of miracle."

The astonishment in Count Andrea's manner gave way to a suave irony.

"How clever," he said. "Yours, Sir Henry, is an extraordinary profession!"

But Sir Henry Marquis replied as if the compliment were sincere.

"Ah, Count," he said, "if we were only clever enough no criminal would escape us. One may think what he likes and be safe but when one acts he leaves behind him evidences that indicate him. And if we have the skill to assemble and fit together these evidences, we can in a fashion build up the criminal agent . . . but one's deductions must be correct."

"Like this deduction of yours about the miracle here!" cried the Count.

"Precisely," replied Sir Henry.

"I would call that inspiration," said the Count.

Sir Henry Marquis looked grave.

"I fear that would be an unhappy word here," he replied. "Inspiration has usually served only to mislead the one that it pretended to enlighten." Then he added a rather queer comment. "My deduction here that this was a thin woman may be too comprehensive . . . that the body of the woman lacked weight may be as far as I ought to go . . . we usually associate weight with bulk, but the relation is not constant even in nature and outside of nature, in what we call the supernatural there may be bulk without weight or with little weight . . . the small size of these footprints and the depths to which they are sunk in the earth, to be precisely accurate, indicate a woman of very little weight—as we understand weight!"

Count Andreas looked puzzled; and I was certainly puzzled at this speech. But Sir Henry Marquis was not pausing to consider us. He was going on into the house. Count Andreas overtook him and led the way up the

stairs to the room which his wife had occupied and from which the jewels had been taken. It adjoined the room which the Count himself occupied separately only by a thin partition. Count Andreas stopped at the door leading from the hall at the head of the stairs into his wife's room.

"I have not permitted this room to be disturbed," he said, "it remains as my wife left it. I preferred to think of her, here, in this setting where she was in loving sympathy with me, and not in the London house where she had the strange delusions against me."

Sir Henry Marquis stopped short as though suddenly seized with some idea, until then vague.

"Ah, yes," he said, "it was in her London house that this lady died, during your absence in Paris, and it was there she called a solicitor 'wishing to bequeath' this ruby bracelet to Miss Sarah Whitney; and it was to this solicitor that she made her strange remark: 'I will come back and make him do it.' "

The Count's shoulder moved as at some unpleasant touch, but he made no reply. He turned at once to the door.

"I regret, sir," he said, "that I am unable to say whether this door was locked, or unlocked, when the thief entered last night. If it were locked, then the thief had a key to it, which is in line with the evidences that this is the work of some discharged servant familiar with the house." Then he turned about to Sir Henry. "Perhaps you can tell this by an examination of the lock."

But Sir Henry Marquis declined to give the door the slightest attention. I was no less astonished than Count Andreas. The door was the way into the room, whether it was fastened or opened seemed to me to be of the very vitals of this inquiry. There was only one possible explanation and the Count put that in his query.

"Do you, perhaps, conclude that the thief did not enter through this door?"

"Oh, no," replied Sir Henry. "The thief entered by this door, but I have a theory that this door was no bar to the sort of creature that accomplished this robbery . . . per-

haps no door in this house would have been any bar. . . . I am inclined to believe that the door means nothing."

But on the inside of the room Sir Henry's interest in physical evidences seemed to reassert itself.

It was a lovely room done in dainty shades of blue. There was an inlaid writing desk near a window; a dressing table with a great mirror and two clothes presses in the wall, with double doors. There was a thin partition between this room and the one occupied by Count Andreas, as though this space had all originally been a single room; there was a door of which the whole face was a mirror standing closed between the two rooms. There was a severity of good taste about the room; no clutter of ornaments; the only picture on the wall was a painting of Count Andreas, by a famous Italian, in a simple frame. It hung over the mantel.

The room gave evidence that it had been long closed; the dust lay in it and there was a great spider web stretching along the bottom of the frame to the wall below it.

But the room was in disorder, everything in it had been opened, pulled out and searched. This search had been minute and thorough. There remained no drawer unopened. It was the work of some one going carefully to be sure that no place of concealment would remain unopened.

Count Andreas made a gesture to indicate this disorder.

"It is I," he said, "who have searched the room. I took this robbery to be the work of some discharged maid, or her accomplice; such a one would know, that I am leaving England and that the house will be presently closed. She might, therefore, if she were clever, conceal the jewels about the room here, in some other place, intending to return later when the house was closed and regain them. This would greatly reduce the risk in the robbery; first, because the ruby bracelet especially, is a piece of conspicuous jewelry. Burma stones so large and of so pure a color could not be accounted for if found in possession,

and the gold work about them is distinguished. And in the second place, I wished to be certain that my wife had not, herself, placed these jewels elsewhere in some drawer of the room instead of the little drawer of her desk which was opened."

Sir Henry Marquis glanced about the room.

"You were quite right," he said, "it is the common custom of the thief to conceal a stolen article near the very spot from which it was taken, especially if he is familiar with the place and able to return to it . . . he reasons that the owner, finding only a single locked drawer opened, will conclude that the lost articles have been taken away. . . . I congratulate you, Count, on your acumen . . . and besides you have saved me the labor of this search."

He gave no attention to this confusion. He went directly to the inlaid writing table, near the window, which Count Andreas indicated. It had a little row of drawers in the center behind the writing pad. The top drawer of this series had been the one from which the jewels were taken.

Count Andreas called Sir Henry's attention particularly to it.

"This drawer was the one in which my wife kept her jewels. I had supposed that it was locked, but it seems to have been opened like the others. You will observe that it is in no manner broken."

Again Sir Henry's interest seemed to be intermittent in the affair. He gave no attention to any evidences of a breaking—a thing one has heard criminal investigation take every care with—but stooped over, put his monocle into his eye and looked carefully at the lock on the drawer.

Then he sat down in the chair before the desk; his hand gathered about his chin like one profoundly puzzled.

"This drawer was locked," he said.

"Impossible!" cried Count Andreas. "It was not broken."

"It was unlocked with the key," said Sir Henry. "Who had the key?"

"My wife only had the key," replied the Count.

Then he added, as a thing incredible:

"You mean that this drawer was locked and on last night was unlocked by some one having possession of the key?"

"That is precisely what I mean," replied Sir Henry. "Dust gathered in this lock as it gathered over all things in this room, the key and the moving bar of the lock have just disturbed it. The thing has been done by some one who knew where the key was."

Count Andreas put the query that must have occurred to us all.

"But what living person could know where the dead Countess had concealed the key to her desk?"

Sir Henry passed his hand slowly over his face, as though he were in some doubt how to reply; then finally he answered.

"But are events in the world exclusively directed by the living? How do we know what will to compel them the dead can exert. All our theories of the existence and influence of the dead are in fact vain imaginings. . . . Did not the Countess, as she was leaving the world, bequeath this ruby bracelet to Miss Sarah Whitney and when the solicitor pointed out that you would take it by operation of law, reply, with a mysterious sentence?"

Count Andreas's face darkened.

"Unfortunately," he added, "my wife was influenced against me in her last illness. I was not in England, and my enemies were with her."

His face grew hard and determined.

"And therefore," he continued, "I disregard the bequest made under the influence of enemies, and this threat. And now I cannot help it that a thief has removed them . . . that the Countress Andreas, dead, and out of the world had any part in this affair is a ridiculous suggestion."

Sir Henry rose; stood a moment as in some reflection and began to walk about the floor. He walked with his head forward, his hands behind him, touching now and then an open drawer or some disturbed article, and stopping, like one whose mind is wholly on some distant thing, to close the open drawer or to carefully replace the dis-

turbed article. He set a little frame neatly on a table; he spread down a corner of a rug; he opened the folding doors to the closets in the wall where the dead woman's clothes hung and shut them carefully; he stopped before the mantel and flecked the mantelpiece absently with his finger. He looked like one in some queer somnambulism, his motions languid; his face vague, with the thick monocle screwed into his eye, with no cord to hold it as though it clung there and must be pulled away in order to remove it.

He glanced up at the painting of Count Andreas where the big spider web attached the bottom of the gilded frame to the wall, peered at it a moment as in the ineptitudes of a trance and passed on.

He made a vague comment like one profoundly concerned with some difficult introspection.

"This spider," he said, "will not have favored the thief here as the Scotch spider favored the Bruce, for it took days to make a big strong tough web like that."

He reached the door; put out his hand in the manner of one so detached that his senses no longer guide him. Then suddenly he faced about and addressed Count Andreas, as though there had been no interval after the man's comment.

"And yet . . . how shall we say that the Countess has not been here?"

He crossed with a stride to one of the closets and threw the door open. There was a little shelf across the bottom of the closet on which were a row of shoes. Sir Henry took up a pair of slippers and brought them over to Count Andreas.

"Look," he said, "there are bits of earth on the heels of these slippers; it is garden earth, and it is quite fresh."

He held out the slipper and his eyeglass to the Hungarian.

"The monocle," he said, "is a rather tremendous lens."

The Count stepped back from Sir Henry's extended hand. But the big Englishman did not seem to notice that shrinking gesture.

"The theory is against all experience of life," Sir Henry went on, "but here are the evidences. One enters this house through a window probably fastened, through a door probably locked, opens a drawer in a desk with a key which the dead woman had hidden, and removes its contents, all so noiselessly that Count Andreas sleeping within a dozen steps is not awakened . . . these slippers belonging to the dead Countess have walked before the window, but with only the weight of a phantom on them. . . . How shall we say that she has not been here?"

The Hungarian faced about as for some stern endeavor. His voice was harsh.

"The dead do not return; this will have been done by some one of my wife's maids, who prepared for it in advance, by taking away with her the key to these drawers and the slippers. The window has probably been unfastened a long time, and the door, as I have said, was probably not locked. . . . It does not require a ghost to go noiselessly about a robbery!"

But one could see that the man's logic did not even convince himself. He did not believe it.

Sir Henry looked strangely at the man.

"This was not the work of any mortal woman! Mortal women have weight!"

He advanced a step toward Count Andreas, and his voice took on a low penetrating menace.

"If I show you that no living person could have done this thing, will you take that for an evidence of your dead wife's will in this affair, and release these bracelets to Miss Whitney . . . if I can find them?"

The Hungarian laughed, as in a sort of harsh bravado . . . as in a sort of ugly challenge.

"Yes," he said, "if you can find them."

There was a certain confidence of victory behind the laugh.

But Sir Henry regarded him like one with some deep serious intent.

"It is a bargain," he said, "before a witness and I accept it."

Then there came into his voice a suave apologetic note.

"Assuming, as a theory, that the Countess Andreas was able to carry out her threat; where should we look to find these jewels? Let us reflect."

He looked steadily at the man before him.

"The dead woman would be at this work to remove these rubies from your possession, and she would place them where you would not look to find them . . . then to find them we must look in that place which you have not searched."

He paused.

"There is only one place in this room," he said, "where you have not looked, and you will agree with me that no living person, on last night, could have concealed the jewels in that place."

He turned abruptly and indicated the Count's portrait fastened to the wall by the great spider web.

He went on.

"No living person could remove that frame without breaking that web, and yet the jewels are concealed in the old folded paper that holds the bottom of this frame out a little from the wall."

Count Andreas made a swift stride forward; but Sir Henry was before him, he wrenched the folded paper from under the frame and thrust it into his pocket.

I thought Count Andreas looked about him for a weapon. Then the menace fell from him and he sat down.

"You are right," he said, "the dead woman has been here."

"If any woman has been here," replied Sir Henry Marquis.

Outside, on the path of the little wood to the village, with the priceless rubies in my hand, I turned to Sir Henry Marquis.

"Did the dead woman come back to carry out her threat?"

"Perhaps the dead woman carried out her threat," he replied, "but she did not come back to do it. Who can

say what power the dead have to move the living to their will!"

"Count Andreas wished to be rid of your insistence, so he prepared these false evidences to indicate that a discharged maid had entered the house and accomplished the robbery. But he was a conspicuous bungler, for all his care; the woman's footprints which he made in the flower bed, by lying down on the turf and pressing the Countess's slipper into the soft earth with his hand, did not show a print deep enough for the weight of a woman. . . . Of course he had the key to the desk drawer."

"But the spider web?" I cried. "How could he move the frame of the portrait to conceal this bracelet behind it, and not break that web?"

Sir Henry fingered the cord to his big monocle.

"The trouble with the spider web," he replied, "was that it is the web of a wood spider, who does not build in a house, and, no matter where he builds he does not fasten his web to its supports with American mucilage.

"The lens of my eyeglass," he added, "is one of the strongest Arnold grinds in Zurich."

MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

THERE was a moment's silence after the attorney for the Government sat down. Everybody thought the judge would at once refuse the motion for a retrial and sentence the prisoner. There was plainly no error. The law was clear, the evidence was sufficient, and the judge had so strongly indicated the guilt of the accused in his charge to the jury that acquittal was out of the question; in fact, he had practically directed the jury to find the prisoner guilty.

Of course a motion to set aside the verdict is always made; but any one could see that it was a mere form here. Surely there was no shadow left for judicial hesitation after the attorney for the Government had finished. It would have taken only a moment, and to-morrow was the last day of the term; but, instead, the judge rose. He looked ill and tired. The heat was oppressive.

"I will pass on the motion in the morning," he said.

The attorney for the prisoner caught at the straw.

"Your Honor will consider the argument?"

"Oh, yes," replied the judge in his tired voice. Then he added: "I have a telegram from the Department of Justice. Two judges of the Supreme Court will be here in the morning. I am asked to leave this case open." Then he swept away the hope: "You may have the benefit of their opinion on the length of sentence."

He looked worn out. It was July. The summer term of the District Court of the United States was always trying, but this sitting had been particularly oppressive. The usual catalogue of crimes—revenue infractions and

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the like—was commonly disposed of swiftly in this court; but he had not been able to expedite this case. It had expanded, lengthened, and worn out his patience. Perhaps dilatory, inefficient counsel was the real cause.

He went into his chamber, took off his black silk gown and gave it to his attendant. He gathered up some papers from his table and inclosed them with a rubber band; then he put on his hat and went out.

These Federal buildings have the city post-office underneath. The judge did not go to the elevator. Several members of the local bar were in the cage. He knew how they would receive him. One would have a story to make him laugh; another some expression from his utterances to flatter—and so on. He felt that he was too tired and irritable to be annoyed; but he did not escape.

On the steps he met the attorney for the prisoner. He was a man who had come up into a practice through the petty intrigues of local politics. He had learned in that school to approach his object obliquely, and he carried this plan into the trial of his cases. He cultivated an open, hearty manner to cover his subtility.

"Judge," he said, "I wish you could manage to go easy on Johnson." And he began to urge the estimable life of the cashier, his long residence in the community, and the fact that no length of penal sentence could help anybody; then he added:

"I think the man is telling the truth, judge. I think he was trying to save the bank."

It was false. His experience moved him to accept the worst motive among all possible ones. The judge, ill and overborne, stopped him.

"I won't hear you, Dickerman," he said. "I'm tired of these curbstone arguments."

The man was unabashed.

"Sure, judge," he replied; "but I got worked up over Johnson. It's an awful pity. He has a nice home and the best little woman in the world."

He said it in the big, emotional manner he was accustomed to use in his campaigns among the people, and it

was true as far as he went; but he neglected to add that the nice home went to him provided he kept the cashie: out of the penitentiary—everything else he had got hold of on a straight-out fee. But he was shrewd. He saw that this was no moment to go farther, and he stepped out of the way.

"I'm glad you're going to join the family at the shore to-morrow night. It'll do you good, judge. . . . Rotten hot here!" And he went on.

Three doors opened from the post office into the street —the great double one in the middle for the public and, on each side of it, one to the elevator and another to the stairway. A big, new motor car stood by the curb and a man in the shade of the building, by the door on the elevator side, was fanning his heated face with a panama hat. He had about him every indicatory evidence of a leading citizen. He was past middle life—in the neighborhood of sixty. He stood erect, with the expansive front that the dominion of money and success give to those lucky men who get up in the world out of a humble origin.

When the judge came out of the Federal Building on the stairway side, the man stepped down to the motor, opened the door of the tonneau and threw up his hand in a friendly signal. The judge entered the motor and sat down as though it were a custom.

"Thank you, Tollman," he said. "It's mighty kind of you to stop for me this way."

"No trouble, judge," replied the man. "I never leave the bank until four o'clock and it's only a turn round the block for you."

He got in, closed the door and the motor moved away from the curb. Then he added:

"What do you suppose the Department's after?"

He had heard the telegram discussed by the spectators coming out of the courtroom.

"It's a national bank," said the judge. "The Government may have some special interest." Then he added: "Members of the Supreme Court sometimes sit on the

circuit, or the Chief Justice may be going out to the Circuit Court of Appeals. We are on the way; it's nothing unusual."

"You didn't sentence Johnson," said the man.

"I left the whole matter open," replied the judge. "If the members of the Supreme Court sit to-morrow they can fix the sentence."

"Dead open-and-shut case?" said Tollman.

"Oh, yes," replied the judge.

He felt very tired and indisposed to talk, but he regarded the obligations of friendly courtesy. Again Tollman slapped his big knee with his fat hand.

"It's a pity! . . . Nice fellow, Johnson—not very smart."

"I thought the trick by which he covered the cash shortage from the bank examiner was exceedingly clever," said the judge. "Has such a thing been done before?"

Tollman pulled out his under lip between his thumb and finger; his foot tapped on the floor of the car.

"Never heard of it," he said. "If anybody ever used it before he was smart enough not to get caught." Then he turned about toward his companion. "You're wrong, judge; Johnson ain't smart. I saw that when he first came into the bank, under me—when I was cashier of the Eighth National."

He had the appearance, whether false or true, of one giving an inside opinion in confidence to a friend.

"He's just a trailer—got no initiative. The bank was bound to go to the wall in competition with modern investment methods. Johnson never struck out on a new line in his life; he followed what other men did. Why, judge!"

He put his fat hand on his companion's arm as though indicative of a deeper confidence.

"He's been running that bank just the same way I used to run it before I made my strike in Universal Steel Common and started the Citizens' National."

He paused and puffed out his chest.

"The banking business must keep up with the times, like any other business."

"Universal Steel Common?" replied the judge. "Isn't that the stock Johnson was gambling in with the bank funds?"

Tollman rocked his big torso in confirmation.

"Exactly!" he said. "The very same! Only it's no good now—went to pot two years ago. The broker knew it was taking pennies out of a blind man's hat. Imagine anybody buying that stock now!"

Then he added in a firmer tone:

"No, judge; Johnson ain't smart. You know how the banking business goes. Sometimes you have to take a nibble at bad stuff to help out a good depositor. Take, for instance, the big block of Gas bonds that first got his bank in bad. He asked me whether the Citizens' National was a subscriber. Well, it wasn't up to me to knock Old Blackwell's bonds. He's a good depositor. I said yes. It was the truth. We had a little of it—covered on the side, of course. . . . Johnson has no sense."

"He has sense enough to know that he was violating the banking laws of the United States," replied the judge.

The big man laughed.

"He knew that all right, I reckon."

"I suppose," continued the judge, "he thought his plan would not be discovered; and perhaps it would not have been but for the chance of your bank opening one of the packages."

Tollman did not reply. The car had entered the street on which the judge lived. It was a street ending in the public highway. A huge, old brick house sat in a grove of ancient maples, on a big plot of ground, at some distance from the street. There was an old-fashioned, low iron fence, with a little gate opening into a red-brick path, before the place. The car stopped. Tollman leaned across his guest and flung the car door open. He spoke, with his head down, in the performance of the act:

"I was offered the leases on the Haverford oil tract mighty low to-day."

The judge did not at once reply. He got out. Then he answered:

"Lawsuits are uncertain! Thank you, Tollman."

It was all the hint the man wanted. The lands were in litigation in the Federal Court and this was a look through the keyhole.

The judge opened the gate and went slowly up the brick path to his door. He was alone in his house for this day and night. His family and servants had gone to the coast to avoid the midsummer heat. He would join them to-morrow night, when his court term closed. He would be glad of the vacation. This evening he felt utterly fagged out and worthless.

As the path turned round some shrubs he saw a figure huddled against his door. The attitude was peculiar. The figure did not seem to be sitting against the door, nor yet was "huddled" the word to describe that posture. The figure seemed to be bent over—the head down, the legs doubled under it; the shoulders and the back stooped. At the sound of his advancing feet the figure rose. He saw that it was the prisoner Johnson's wife; and he remembered vaguely that just now he had not seen her in her accustomed place by the prisoner's chair.

The whole aspect of this woman was one of inconsolable misery. Her eyes were swollen; the muscles of her face were drawn; her mouth seemed slack and loose, and from time to time it trembled, though the woman no longer wept. She was young; but her worn, faded, neglected dress, the strain of the long trial, the despair at the result of it, and the constant misery had aged her. Her brown hair looked dead about the livid face, twitching from lack of sleep.

"Oh, judge," she said, "won't you save him?" The extremity of bitter misery was in the broken voice. "He did no more than other men had done before—only he did it for the bank—not for himself. He thought everything Mr. Tollman had anything to do with was all right. I know all about it. The jury didn't understand. You don't understand!"

This was the one thing the judge loathed and hated—this emotional appeal of the wife, the mother, the sweetheart of the accused. Women never understood that courts considered only proximate causes; that men were tried for the commission of those overt acts that by the letter of the law constituted a crime. They never understood that ultimate motives, influences and all the vast ramifications of an event could not be inquired into. They never regarded legal rules governing the introduction of evidence; that the law did not consider what one thought or believed; that cases were not tried on feeling. The judge endeavored to explain that all the things she urged could not be considered in the case—and how irregular her conduct was.

"I cannot hear you," he said.

The woman swayed a moment, looking him in the face; then she sank down in that peculiar posture—on her knees, her back bent, her face in her hands. And she began to speak, trembling, shaken, with jerky words:

"What'll I do? . . . You won't hear me. . . . Oh, God! What'll I do? He's a good man. I know him; I'm his wife. . . . He didn't mean any harm. The things other men did drove him into it. Oh, God! If the judge would only think about everything! If there was only somebody to understand everything they wouldn't make him suffer for all of it!"

It seemed to the judge that the best thing for him to do was to pass quickly. He opened the door with a latchkey, entered and closed it behind him. Then he put down his hat and, with his bundle of legal papers under his arm, went slowly up the stairway. At the first landing he stopped, held on to the baluster and looked back. Through the little squares of glass along the side of the door he could see the woman on the porch in that abject position, the tears trickling through her fingers.

The court opened with the two Supreme Judges sitting with the District Judge. A gust of rain had cleared out the heat. The air was fresh. Everybody seemed vitalized

and restored to the energies of life—except the District Judge. He looked the mere physical wreck of a man. His face was pallid and his jaw sagged as he sat in his black silk robe between his two associates. Perhaps the fine, clean-cut, vital faces of those two associate judges brought his ill appearance more conspicuously to the eye.

The courtroom was crowded. Everybody came in to see the visiting members of the Supreme Court.

We have a belief that the conduct of great affairs and elevation above the passions and interests of men give, in time, to the human face a power and serenity beyond anything to be observed in our usual life. And the aspect of these two members of the highest tribunal in the world amply justified this theory. Everybody was impressed. The courtroom was silent. The clerk and attendants went about on tiptoe and spoke in whispers. There was an atmosphere of dignity that swept out and ejected every trivial thing.

There was here, now, the awe and the solemnity, the grip of power, that we feel must inevitably attend the majestic presence of that vast, dominating, imperial thing we call the State. Everybody felt that, at last—finally—he was before that regal ultimate authority that ruled the order of his life and the conduct of his affairs, pressing on him on all sides invisibly, like the air—an authority that he could neither resist nor question.

The whole local bar was in the courtroom. The chairs before the attorneys' tables were filled. The entire jury panel was present. The prisoner Johnson sat inside the rail, near his attorney. He sat with his head down, his hands open and resting awkwardly on his knees, like one who, having passed through every misery, dumbly awaits the end of all things.

His wife was now in the chair beside him. Her face was washed out and gray, like plaster; but it was lifted; and the wide-distended eyes followed every act and gesture of the two majestic judicial figures. She did not move; she saw nothing about her in the courtroom; she heard no sound or whisper. Those visiting members of

the Supreme Bench, sitting on each side of the almost ghastly District Judge, alone engrossed and dominated her attention.

The younger justice, on the left of the bench, conducted the business of the court.

"The case," he said, "of the United States *versus* Carter Johnson is before us on a motion to set aside the verdict of the jury and grant a new trial."

His voice, clear and even like a sheet of light, filled the remote corners of the courtroom.

"On yesterday we directed the District Judge to hold this case open until we could arrive and sit with him. It is not the custom of the Department of Justice, to which we belong, to interfere in the temporary conduct of matters in these inferior tribunals below us; but this case has been brought forcibly to our attention and we have determined to appear here and dispose of it.

"Carter Johnson was the cashier of the Eighth National Bank of this city. He was convicted in this court on two several counts—the misappropriation of bank funds and the falsification of the bank statement under oath. The facts are that the directors of this bank left the conduct of its affairs to the cashier, Johnson, as they were accustomed to do with the former cashier. Johnson invested heavily in an issue of Gas bonds. These securities rapidly depreciated in value. To recoup the loss Johnson speculated with bank funds. This speculation was unsuccessful, and to cover the cash shortage in his accounts Johnson resorted to a deceptive trick."

The justice went on:

"It is a custom of the Treasury Department of the United States to send out packages of money. These packages, when received, are inclosed by a strip of paper pasted round them. This strip of paper or label is stamped with the amount and denomination of the bills making up the package. No bank questions the correctness of these labels. Carter Johnson made use of this Treasury custom in order to cover the cash shortage in his bank.

"He carefully preserved the printed bands from the

packages of bills of high denomination that his bank would get from the Treasury in the course of business. When the examiner appeared he would remove the bands from packages of low denomination, paste on the false bands, and send out these apparently original Treasury packages to other banks in the city. He would ask the banks to hold these packages and let him have loose currency. By this plan he was able to show his cash on hand correct. Later, when the examiner was gone, he would return the currency and receive back his packages. This trick, invented by an intelligence, cunning and regardless of fair dealing, enabled him to cover his defalcations for a considerable period."

Then he concluded:

"These are the facts. They were established beyond doubt and the verdict of the jury was inevitable."

He looked down at the prisoner.

"It is our opinion that the motion to set aside the verdict and grant a new trial ought to be overruled."

There was on the prisoner no evidence of this crushing blow, except that he seemed to sink down a little in his chair. The woman beside him gave no sign whatsoever. Perhaps she did not realize what these formal words meant—that they swept away her last vestige of hope; but the aspect of the prisoner, thus crumpled up as by some disintegrating pressure, drew the attention of the elder justice on the right of the bench. He spoke, looking out over the courtroom:

"That every man shall realize in his own person the result of his premeditated act is a condition of human affairs that we are not here to disturb."

There was no emotion in his face or in the words he uttered; there was only the supreme serenity of a phenomenon in Nature.

There was a moment of silence and the younger justice continued with the case.

"We are also of the opinion," he said, "that this whole matter ought to be disposed of. Rutger Beekman is in the courtroom. Let him stand up."

A little man, prim and very carefully dressed, who had been entirely hidden by the crowd, came out and stood before the rail. He looked discolored, and the lids below his eyes puffed as from the ravages of an organic disease. Everybody moved with interest. This was the Eastern broker to whom Johnson had sent the money for his speculations.

"You obeyed our summons?" said the justice.

The little man was very greatly disturbed.

"Yes, your Honor," he answered in a nervous voice.

The justice went on:

"The books in your office, exhibited to the Federal authorities, show that from time to time you purchased for Carter Johnson forty-eight thousand shares of Universal Steel Common at one dollar a share."

He stopped and looked down at the man before the rail.

"Your books do not show that a secret partner, one Livingston Prichard, created this market for your purchase with stock bought at its actual value of twenty-five cents a share. Where is the remaining thirty-six thousand dollars?"

The little man's face seemed to turn to ashes; he hung a moment on his toes, his mouth open. The justice went on, with no change in his calm, deliberate voice:

"The money, in United States gold certificates, is in safety-deposit box number 472 of the North Dominion Trust Company, in the city of Montreal."

He paused.

"It is the order of this court that you, Rutger Beekman, turn over to the register the key to this box, now on your person, together with your order to the vault officer, signed with two marks under the signature according to your secret understanding with that official. You will also pay into court the amount of your commission—that is to say, one-fourth of one per cent on the whole sum of forty-eight thousand dollars."

Everybody was astonished. Hiram Tollman, president of the Citizens' National Bank, sitting behind the attorneys, knew that the Federal Secret Service had run this case

down in every direction. He regretted now that he had taken so prominent a seat in the courtroom. With the result of so vast a system of secret espionage, no one could say what features of this affair might come up. He looked at the trembling broker turning over his key to the register of the court, and sweat dampened the palms of his hands. The calm voice of the justice was going on:

"The certificates delivered to Carter Johnson have been sold for their actual value of twenty-five cents a share; our order restores to the insolvent bank the entire sum drawn out by the cashier and adjusts this feature."

He paused and looked at his associate.

"Shall we consider, here, the aspect of Rutger Beekman's criminal responsibility?"

"Let it go over," replied the elder justice. "Beekman will be presently before us."

These words, simple and uttered with no threat or menace, gave everybody in the courtroom a sense of vague, unreasoning terror.

"We come now," continued the younger justice, "to a consideration of the original loss of the Eighth National Bank, which the cashier undertook to recoup by his speculations."

This was the thing of which the president of the Citizens' National Bank was apprehensive. He had hoped to slip out of the courtroom unnoticed. He was feeling under his chair for his hat, when the voice of the justice reached him as with the impact of a blow:

"Hiram Tollman is in the courtroom. Let him stand up."

He got on his feet, it seemed to the man, by no will and by no muscular effort of his own; his whole body damp with sweat. He looked up at the District Judge as for some cover or protection. The visiting justice crushed out the man's mute appeal.

"The District Judge," he said, "sits with us to-day for the purpose only of entering such orders as we shall direct."

And the fact was abundantly evident. The judge was not consulted and he took no part in the conduct of the

court affairs. He sat between the two Supreme Court judges, pallid and ill, his face sunken. The justice went on in his even voice:

"When the cashier of the Eighth National Bank was offered the block of Gas bonds he inquired whether your bank was a subscriber to the issue. You replied that it was. This answer, true in a narrow interpretation of words, was, in fact, intended to deceive. Your subscription was for ten bonds only and attended by collateral security. Carter Johnson took your answer to mean that you considered this issue to be a safe, desirable security. He relied on it and accordingly invested seventy-five thousand dollars in these bonds. The bonds were, in fact, worth twenty-five thousand—all of which you, Hiram Tollman, on that day and at the moment of the inquiry, well knew. . . . Now by that investment, so made, the Eighth National Bank lost the sum of fifty thousand dollars, and the succeeding events resulted."

The man standing up in the court room trembled, and sweat threaded along the creases of his obese body. He tried to urge some justification, but seemed unable to formulate the thing.

The elder justice appeared to grasp what he meant; for he said in his deep, level voice:

"It is not our purpose to hold one man responsible for the neglect of another. What one undertakes to do, or pretends to do, for the benefit of persons maintaining him in a position of trust, we hold him bound to perform."

The younger justice waited a moment, as though in emphasis of the pronouncement of the elder and as a profound courtesy. He looked down at the silent faces turned everywhere toward the bench. Then he went on:

"The directors of the Eighth National Bank are in the courtroom. Let them stand up."

Five men, sitting here and there on the packed benches, rose. The attorney, Dickerman, was general counsel for these directors. They were his best, his most substantial clients; and now, by a supreme measure of assurance, he rose and addressed the judges.

"Your Honors," he said, "these men are not in court as parties to any proceeding and no order can be entered against them."

The justice looked calmly at the man.

"Everybody concerned with this affair is before us," he said, "and will be included in our decree. As for you, Sylvester Dickerman, it is our order that you be allowed twenty-five dollars a day for your services during the conduct of the trial of Carter Johnson, and no more. You will return all fees above that sum, together with your contract contingent on the acquittal of the accused."

There was silence; and he added:

"We have observed your methods for a long time. They do not please us, Sylvester Dickerman. But we do not revoke your license. You will be presently before us, and we think that your knowledge of this fact will be a sufficient safeguard of the public interest."

The man seemed appalled, like one who suddenly sees an invisible peril uncovered before him.

The justice went on:

"As for you"—and he named the five directors—"you have neglected the duties which you assumed to perform for the stockholders of the Eighth National Bank. In consequence of that neglect—but for one consideration—our decree would direct you to pay into the bank the loss of this investment—that is to say, the sum of fifty thousand dollars—out of your individual private fortunes.

"As the matter stands, you will pay, share and share alike, all the costs of the proceedings in this court, including the trial of Carter Johnson and the fees allowed by us to his attorney; all the costs and expenses of the receivership; and whatever sums are required to rehabilitate the Eighth National Bank."

The justice looked now at the prisoner, and that abject person rose as though the look were in itself a compelling summons. He stood with his body relaxed, his shoulders stooped, his head down. The woman beside him also rose, her strained white face fixed on the justice as by the fascination of some invisible sorcery. The whole court-

room was profoundly silent. Everybody thought that sentence on the prisoner was about to be pronounced; but, instead, the justice turned toward the man Tollman, standing within the rail behind the local bar.

"It is an elementary principle of justice," he said, "regarded by all men, that no one shall take a gain at the risk of another. He shall take his gain at his own risk."

He paused and addressed Tollman directly:

"It is on this conception of justice, Hiram Tollman, that we are about to consider your responsibility in this affair. That Carter Johnson trusted to your judgment in the purchase of securities is a secondary matter, behind the primary duty of the cashier and directors of this bank to investigate for themselves. That you were cashier of this bank when Carter Johnson entered it as a clerk, and that he continued to be influenced by your methods and example, are not considerations moving us toward our decree."

Here the elder justice again uttered a pronouncement that no man present in the courtroom ever afterward forgot.

"That another influenced me," he said, "and I violated the law is a defense that we shall always reject."

Then the younger justice continued:

"The basis of our decree against you, Hiram Tollman, is in the fact that you took a gain at the risk of the Eighth National Bank. The money which you used in the first speculations, which made your fortune, was the money of this bank, in your custody as cashier. It was you, Hiram Tollman, who invented the trick—afterward used by Carter Johnson—to cover the shortage in your currency during the period of your speculations. Unlike Johnson, you were successful in your investments. Your trick was not discovered; you put back the funds placed in hazard and converted the gain to your own use.

"You imagined, Hiram Tollman, that this matter was adjusted by the return of the funds. It was not so adjusted. The gain must be restored to adjust it. That gain,

together with the legal interest to date, is one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars; and it is our order that you pay it in to the receiver of the Eighth National Bank within thirty days after the rising of this court."

All persons in the courtroom were amazed. The vast, invisible espionage of the Department of Justice appalled them. Every man connected in any degree with a doubtful affair was seized with apprehension and began to go back over the details of his life, fearful lest he had overlooked some avenue through which his affair might have come to the knowledge of this elaborate Secret Service, which nothing seemed to escape.

The younger justice ceased, and the elder, sitting on the right of the bench, addressed the prisoner. Everybody thought that he was about to deliver some elaborate opinion; but he uttered only one preliminary sentence.

"Excessive punishment," he said, "is, beyond all things, abhorrent to us. You are released from the custody of the marshal."

The prisoner, expecting to receive a penal sentence, would have fallen but for the arms of the woman about him, her face transfigured.

To all this the justices of the Supreme Bench gave no attention. The younger began to dictate the orders and decrees covering the points of his decision; and when they were written out the District Judge, sitting motionless in his black robes, signed them without a word:

"Enter. WILLIAM A. PLAINFIELD."

It was night. The judges left the Federal Building, the District Judge walking between the two justices of the Supreme Court. Persons on the street, as in awe, crossed to the opposite side as the three impressive figures approached. They turned into the grounds of the District Judge and entered his house.

The community of misfortunes drew the banker—Tollman—the lawyer and the broker together as they came out on the street.

"Who summoned you to appear?" said Dickerman. ad

dressing the broker. "The New York marshal couldn't find you when we sent over a subpœna."

"Nobody summoned me."

"How did you get notice to appear, then?"

"I didn't get any notice," replied the man. "I just felt that I had to come."

The lawyer looked at the broker a moment, his eyes wide, his mouth gaping; then, without a word, he crossed the street to the telegraph office, the others following. The operator was a friend of Dickerman's.

"Mack," he said, breathing quickly, like a man with a defective heart, "did the judge get a telegram yesterday?"

"Sure!" replied the man.

"Where from?"

"Washington, I reckon," answered the operator, turning over his file for the message. "It's not marked."

"Ask Washington," said the lawyer.

The line was open and the operator called. There was silence and after a time the instrument clicked.

"That's queer," said the operator—"not sent from Washington! That's damn queer! It came over the line."

They went out and along the street to the judge's residence, all moved in common by a single fearful idea. The house was wholly dark. They stopped at the gate. Other persons joined them. A crowd assembled. Finally it moved from the gate along the brick path to the door. The door was locked. No one replied to the bell or knocking.

Finally an officer got in through a window and opened the door. The family doctor joined him and the two men went up the steps together. The crowd waited, silent, in the hall and on the porch outside.

Suddenly the voice of the doctor reached them from an upper chamber, where he stooped over the body of a man lying across the threshold, his bundle of legal papers scattered on the floor.

"Dead! . . . The judge!"

Then, a moment later:

"Good God! His limbs are set in *rigor mortis!* He's been dead twenty-four hours!"

All at once, with a sickening sense of dread, the broker, the lawyer, the banker—everybody from the courtroom—realized that the District Judge had been sitting, for this day, between the two mysterious justices, after he was dead; and that, for this day, the administration of justice in the court had been taken over by the Ultimate Authority—infinite and just—behind the moving of events.

HERMAN LANDON

THE PIGEON ON THE SILL

"If you want solitude," said Major Briggs, stroking a mustache whose crispness had survived his active military career, "you ought to try Cedar Cove. The place aches with solitude. I ought to know. Stuck it out for six summers."

Thomas Maurice Webb wanted particulars. Major Briggs swallowed a pepsin tablet and expatiated deprecatingly on the secluded character of Cedar Cove.

"If unmitigated isolation is what you want," he concluded, "the place is yours for as long as you can stand it. As for me, though, I wouldn't be found dead in a place like that."

So it came about that Thomas Maurice Webb gathered together a few necessities, including Madam Katoo and his priceless man Knobbetts, and went out to a rock-strewn and unlovely section of shore front to write his "Memoirs of a Diplomat." It did not occur to him that there might have been an unconscious note of prophecy in the major's adverse comment on Cedar Cove as a place in which to be found dead. His digestion was excellent, his heart sound, his blood pressure normal, and his only apparent worry was a stepson who was going to the devil as fast as legs could carry him. Moreover, his chief reason, although not his ostensible one, for going to Cedar Cove was that he did not wish to be found dead for a long time yet.

He looked a little frail, yet he was a man of much dignity. You could easily picture him in silk knee-breeches and other court trappings, comporting himself with utmost ease while being received in audience by a majesty.

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Strong features, an erect bearing, gray hair that looked as if it had been combed in anger, a bit of swagger and a touch of arrogance combined to give him a distinguished air. The cool and deliberate nature of great minds was his. Anecdotes gathered about his personality like moths about a bright light, some of them true, all of them believable. It was related, for instance, that one dark night, while recuperating at a watering place in Florida, he had been accosted by a footpad on a dark highway.

"Please don't shoot," Mr. Webb had said. "I am here for my health."

The footpad, governed by Heaven only knew what mysterious sentiments, had slunk away. Mr. Webb, still in possession of his watch and wallet, had continued his stroll. His heart might have jostled his Adam's apple for a minute, but nobody knew that part of the story.

Neither did anybody know that Mr. Webb slid an old army revolver into the double bottom of one of the bags after Knobbetts had packed his luggage preparatory to their departure for Cedar Cove. Arrived there, he kept it in his desk by day and under his pillow at night. Neither did Knobbetts know how carefully his master had guarded the secret of their destination so that only Major Briggs knew their whereabouts. It did not occur to him that their arrival at Cedar Cove coincided almost to a day with Jimmie Garrett's release from the penitentiary. And there were many other things Knobbetts did not know. His master's habit, for instance, of examining the fastenings of doors and windows late at night, long after his supposed retirement. And the even more astonishing custom of always looking under the bed before he crawled in between the sheets. It was by such secrecy that Thomas Maurice Webb remained a hero to his valet.

He had his eccentricities, of course. Knobbetts understood all great men had them. He was a hard man, severe and domineering and inexorably just in matters of wrongdoing, yet it was this same Thomas Maurice Webb who had picked up a maimed kitten on the street one day and

nursed it back to health. A man of contradictions, certainly. And Knobbetts knew only half of it.

Madam Katoo, had there been a reasoning brain beneath her russet crest, might have got an inkling of the other half. Perhaps she would have indulged in a derisive cackle or two upon learning that Thomas Maurice Webb was a fraud and a poser. She was alone with him at night, saw him pace the floor with his nervous strut, saw him look under the bed and into the clothes-closet, heard him mumble to himself occasionally; and she might have deduced that he was afflicted with such a morbid dread of loneliness that even a cockatoo offered agreeable company. A dog would have seemed a more natural companion for a lonely man, but the trouble with dogs was that they understood too much. You couldn't fool them very well. They knew by instinct whether a man was as composed and intrepid as he tried to appear, or a coward at heart.

It was Madam Katoo who, in the evening of the day following their arrival at Cedar Cove, got a glimpse of Mr. Webb's hidden self as he sat reading a newspaper in his improvised study. The house in its entirety was of noble lines and dimensions for a summer dwelling and showed many traces of former dignity, but the ground-floor room in which Mr. Webb sat was narrow and low-ceiled, with many sprawling cracks in the wall plaster and furnished only with a desk, two chairs, Madam Katoo's cage and a bad picture of a young woman dipping water from a stream. The desk was in the center, beneath a hanging oil lamp, and if Mr. Webb should look up and glance out the window he would see only a huge gnarled oak outside and, a few yards beyond it, an old barn that obstructed all further view. Between the barn and the house was a broad driveway of cobblestones which swerved sharply just outside the window and wound up at the front entrance.

An obscure item of news was absorbing Mr. Webb's attention. It stated that James Garrett, adopted son of Thomas Maurice Webb, whose achievements in the diplo-

matic service were still fresh in the public mind, had just been released from the penitentiary, his original sentence of seven years for grand larceny having been cut in half by the board of pardons. Asked by a reporter what he intended doing now that he was free again, Garrett had made facetious reply.

"Oh, I crave a bit of excitement after being walled in so long. Maybe I'll go tiger hunting for a while."

Just a bit of flippancy, to all appearance. Thousands who read the item would see nothing else in the statement. But Mr. Webb's mind turned back a number of years, to the time when Jimmie had nicknamed him Old Tiger. That was before Jimmie had started to turn out bad. Afterward he had spurned his stepfather's discipline along with his name. By quick stages the young scapegrace had gone from bad to worse, and from worse to prison. It was partly due to Mr. Webb's stern sense of justice that he had gone there. Jimmie's last words to him before they took him away had been:

"Some day I'll get you for this, Old Tiger."

There had been a thin blaze of hate in his eyes as he said it. And Mr. Webb imagined there had been a blaze of hate in Jimmie's heart as he made that statement to the reporter. There was a strained look in his face. Yes, he was afraid of Jimmie Garrett. He was afraid of many things, though no living soul suspected it—of the sea, of fires, of motor-cars, of burglars, of the dark, of earthquakes, of pestilence, of poverty and of death. It was rarely he had a moment's peace. Fear in one form or another was always with him. Yet it was a peculiar kind of fear, something that Mr. Webb himself couldn't explain. It didn't seem to come from any tangible menaces. The thing he feared most seemed to be fear itself, something that shook and shamed him even while he fought against it.

It was so with respect to Jimmie Garrett. He did not fear violence or death at Jimmie's hands, but he feared he would not be able to look death in the face without

quavers. Something like that, anyhow. That was why, on the pretext that he needed solitude to write his memoirs, he had gone into hiding at Cedar Cove. Gone into hiding! He smiled ironically. That was the humiliating truth, suspected by no man, not even by Knobbetts, who was a faithful and versatile sort and invaluable in a place like this, even though Mr. Webb suspected that he sometimes made faces behind his back.

"Hello, Tom."

The screechy salutation made Mr. Webb start sharply. Madam Katoo was one of the few living beings in the habit of addressing him so familiarly. He looked about him with bewilderment. The cage was empty and the door stood ajar. Madam Katoo herself, her bright crest and gay plumage vivified by the rays of the setting sun, sat pertly on a limb of the oak just outside the window, viewing the former diplomat with a dapper and roguish mien. At once he understood what had happened. The fastenings of the cage door must have given way to continuous strain.

"Come here," he directed sternly. "Come here instantly."

"Go to hell," said Madam Katoo.

Mr. Webb frowned. He suspected Knobbetts had added that forceful phrase to the cockatoo's scant vocabulary. He coaxed and bullied, but the bird was obstinate. The world was hers, and she knew it. But as soon as the former diplomat had exhausted all his diplomacy she flew demurely back to her cage.

When Knobbetts called him to dinner a few minutes later, Mr. Webb was once more his composed and imperturbable self. In the days that followed he devoted himself with greater energy to his memoirs. The beneficent effects of the simple life told in clearer eyes and steadier nerves. Even Madam Katoo, now at liberty to roam at her pleasure between the cage and the oak, since she had demonstrated that she had no great wanderlust, might have remarked that his secret worries seemed to be departing. After all, Mr. Webb sometimes reflected, it was

extremely unlikely that Jimmie Garrett would find him here.

But one afternoon Knobbetts brought disturbing tidings. A tramp of decidedly unfavorable aspect had invaded their privacy. The vagabond had spent last night in the barn, and now he was sunning himself on a near-by ledge of rock.

"Why don't you tell him to move on?" asked Mr. Webb.

"I did, sir, but he won't."

Mr. Webb glanced involuntarily at the desk drawer that contained his revolver. Then he looked down at his manuscript. A tiny drop of ink had fallen on a half-written page. He blotted it deliberately.

"What does he look like?" he inquired casually.

Knobbetts' description, dealing most with dirt and tatters, was unsatisfactory. Dirt and tatters might hide a Jimmie Garrett. Mr. Webb tried to view the problem with diplomatic calm.

"Feed him and put him to work sawing wood," he directed. "He can sleep in the barn."

Knobbetts summoned courage to voice a gentle protest.

"If you don't mind my saying so—"

"I do," said Mr. Webb sharply.

Knobbetts withdrew. Mr. Webb congratulated himself upon a wise decision. He looked out the window, and soon he saw Knobbetts conduct the tramp toward the wood pile behind the barn. He tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the fellow's face. In a few minutes, however, he heard a series of strident sounds. The tramp had gone to work with the saw. Mr. Webb's little test had succeeded. It was impossible to imagine Jimmie Garrett at work with a saw. The fellow must be just a casual tramp.

But misgivings arose anew when, the following day, Knobbetts reported that the tramp was suffering severely from blisters on his hands.

"Blisters?" said Mr. Webb. A tramp with blisters on

his hands? It seemed a bit incongruous. He thought of Jimmie Garrett again. Jimmie's hands would blister very quickly if, by a violent stretch of the imagination, one could imagine him sawing wood.

"Give him a pair of gloves," he directed.

"There's only one pair in the house, sir, the ones you bought before you left town. They're too good for a tramp to wear."

"Then give him a dollar and tell him to walk to the village and buy a pair."

"A dollar, sir?" Knobbetts' frugal soul was in revolt. He looked very much as if he would have preferred to put the dollar in his own pocket. "You can get a good pair of cotton gloves for fifteen cents, sir."

Mr. Webb considered. He was very anxious to inspect the tramp. In the end he dismissed Knobbetts and went himself to the wood-pile behind the barn. The tramp sat on a log and looked at his hands with a pained air. He wore a thick stubble of beard, but even if it had been twice as thick a glance would have told Mr. Webb that he had alarmed himself in vain.

His relief rendered him extravagant. He peeled a two-dollar bill from a roll, told the tramp to get himself a pair of gloves, adding that he could keep the change.

Then he returned to his desk and was soon absorbed in his work. He scarcely heard Knobbetts coax the old flivver into activity and start on his daily trip to the village for mail and provisions. The hours passed quickly. Noon came, but Knobbetts did not return. Perhaps the flivver, an old rattletrap affair that belonged on the premises, had broken down. Mr. Webb was getting hungry, but he tried to recapture his thoughts and go on with his work.

His thoughts flowed slowly and with interruptions. Soon his pen paused in the middle of a sentence. Three o'clock struck, and still no Knobbetts. Mr. Webb's nerves were on edge. He wondered whether the tramp had returned from his trip to the village. With Knobbetts gone, a strange and oppressive feeling seemed to brood over

the lonely house. The air was stifling, with an electric quality in it, as if a storm were on the way. Madam Katoo sat very still in her cage, as if she too felt the depressing influence.

Mr. Webb opened the window, glanced up at a sullen sky, crossed the room a few times, then stopped suddenly at the desk and looked down at the sentence he had left unfinished. Though his eyes were on the writing, he was listening to sounds coming from the outside. There were footsteps, and they had a furtive and disagreeable sound. With a flutter of plumage and a screechy complaint Madam Katoo flew from her cage and perched on a limb of the oak outside. Mr. Webb stood motionless, listening, little tremors jogging up and down his spine.

The footsteps drew nearer, Madam Katoo uttered a few muffled squawks. Still Mr. Webb stood looking down at the unfinished sentence. There was a tightness at his throat, a hammering at his ribs. His hand shook a trifle as he opened the drawer and saw that the revolver was still there.

Now the footfalls were quite close. A shadowy form passed hurriedly in front of the window.

"Jimmie!" came Madam Katoo's screech from her perch in the oak. "Dam' loafer!"

The raucous call rasped on Mr. Webb's taut nerves. Madam Katoo remembered, even after these three and a half years. For days now Jimmie's name would be on her sharp tongue.

Mr. Webb heard the outer door swing on its rusty hinges and close with a slam. He leaned weakly against the desk, trying to still the tremors of his body and control the fear which he dreaded even more than Jimmie Garrett's vengeance.

Footsteps approached the door, then stopped. There came a fearful pause. Mr. Webb sat down in the chair beside the desk. Why was Jimmie Garrett delaying? Deliberating his mode of attack, perhaps. He stifled an impulse to run. It would be useless, for Jimmie Garrett could run faster. Besides, the impulse to run was a thing

of reason only; it didn't come from his heart. He did not want to run away. The moments dragged. A fierce resolution came, smothering all else. Whatever was to happen, he must meet it with the same fraudulent calm—a sort of self-hypnotism it was—with which he had faced dangers in the past.

A hand was fumbling at the knob outside. Mr. Webb straightened up and took the pen in his hand. It shook between his fingers. He threw all the tattered remnants of his nerve force into the shaking hand. The tremors lessened; now the hand was steady. His lips formed a tight smile as he gazed at the now unwavering pen. It was a triumph of mind over quaking body, and it filled him with a grim exaltation.

The door came open. A moment longer he gazed at the pen in his hand. Not the slightest tremor now. The sight gave him added fortitude. He dipped the pen in ink, bent his head over the manuscript, gazed down at the unfinished sentence.

Jimmie Garrett, tall, lean, disheveled, with a pallid strain in his face, stood in the opening. With a smolder in narrowed eyes he looked at the man seated at the desk, the gray head inclined over a sheet of paper, pen poised over his writing.

Mr. Webb looked up. Every nerve and every muscle was taut with a terrific strain, but all Jimmie Garrett saw was a look of mild surprise.

"Oh, you, Jimmie."

The voice was steady. Jimmie Garrett saw no signs of the struggle that rendered it so. Perhaps he had hoped his entrance would create a dramatic surprise. With a look of spite and chagrin he opened his coat, took a small packet from an inner pocket and flung it contemptuously on the desk.

Mr. Webb picked it up, looked at it, fixed an uncomprehending gaze on Jimmie Garrett.

"Money?"

Jimmie Garrett tossed a few silver coins and two coppers on the desk.

"Seven hundred sixty-four dollars and seven cents," he said.

"Oh!" Mr. Webb was frankly surprised now. "That's the amount you took."

"With interest," said Jimmie Garrett shortly.

Mr. Webb nodded. He counted the money deliberately. His face was a little pale, but his hand showed no quiver as he raked the bills and coins into a drawer.

"You surprise me, Jimmie," he remarked.

Jimmie Garrett shrugged. The sneer on his lips grew more pronounced. The other's apparent composure seemed to bewilder and infuriate him.

"I told you I would return the money," he declared. "I've done it. We are even—as far as the money is concerned."

Mr. Webb nodded matter-of-factly, although the implied threat did not escape him.

"May I inquire where you got it, Jimmie?"

"Borrowed it from a friend. I'd rather be in his debt than in yours."

Mr. Webb searched his face. He recalled that Jimmie had never lied, no matter what else he had done. The young man's eyes were steady despite the smolder that trembled in their depths.

"As you know," said Mr. Webb evenly, "I didn't care about the money. That didn't mean anything. What hurt me was that you had stooped to thievery."

"Hurt you?" Jimmie Garrett's jeering laugh was loud and hoarse. "Hurt you? Why, you have no more human feeling than a buzzard. You threw me in jail over a few hundred dollars."

"It was the law, Jimmie, not I."

"You could have stopped it."

"If you had come to me and confessed, perhaps. I turned the case over to a detective agency. They discovered the truth. Then there was nothing to do but let the law take its course. Your term in prison seems to have done you good."

Again Jimmie Garrett's bitter laugh rang out

"Yes, it has done you good," Mr. Webb insisted. "Once I thought your pride and your sense of decency were dead. Prison life seems to have revived them. You have proved that by returning the money you stole."

"Oh, don't preach!" Jimmie Garrett snarled. "It makes me sick to hear you. I wouldn't have touched your rotten money if I hadn't been drinking and if I hadn't been in the damnedest pinch a man was ever in. Anyway, I'd rather steal than be a frost-bitten old mountebank like you."

Mr. Webb quavered beneath his placid exterior. By returning the money Jimmie Garrett had thrown him into a confusion more demoralizing than fear. He had expected a different sort of scene. This was even more disturbing than open violence. But it would not do to let the young man glimpse the tumult within him. He must hang on to his make-believe imperturbability.

"At any rate," he said without a tremor, "you have proven yourself a man by returning the money. Come and see me at my office when I return to the city. Perhaps we can arrange something. In the meantime, if you need money—"

"I don't."

"Very well, then." Mr. Webb dipped his pen and bent his head over the manuscript. He struck a pose of mental absorption, and he knew it was well done. Now he ran his eyes over the paragraph ending in the unfinished sentence. To complete it with Jimmie Garrett standing there, looking down at him out of his inflamed eyes, would be something of a triumph, a gesture of derision at the horde of fears snapping at his nerves.

He brought his pen to the paper, but the thoughts would not come. Jimmie Garrett's presence was distracting. His silence grew to be maddening. Mr. Webb could stand it no longer. He looked up, then looked quickly down again. What was the meaning of that awful look he had seen in Jimmie Garrett's face? Murder?

His fingers cramped convulsively about the pen. In a moment he had recaptured his spurious calm; the twitch-

ing of his fingers ceased. He must erase from his mind the look he had seen in Jimmie Garrett's face. Again he fixed his eyes on the unfinished sentence. He must write something—anything. But what he wrote bore no relation to what went before.

My adopted son, James Garrett, is here," were the words that fell with surprising smoothness from his pen. "He is in an ugly mood. I believe he contemplates doing me bodily harm.

His pen paused. A faint smile twitched his lips. Jimmie Garrett could not know what he had written. If the worst should come to pass, if the passion he had seen in Jimmie Garrett's face should explode in an act of murder, then these lines would tell their own story. And people would say that Thomas Maurice Webb had been a hero indeed. They would praise his iron composure. A man who could indite an accusation against his slayer even while looking death in the face.

A faint chuckle escaped him. They would never guess what a charlatan he had been. And then a dynamic strain in the atmosphere compelled him to look up again. It was growing dark. There were mutters of thunder in the distance. Not for more than a second could he trust himself to look into Jimmie Garrett's terrible face. Then he reached into the drawer, took out the revolver and placed it at his elbow. He steadied his hand, then wrote:

I am armed. My weapon lies at my elbow. I hope it will act as a deterrent—

The pen came to a rasping pause. His arm darted out, but it was too late. Jimmie Garrett had flung himself across the desk and snatched the pistol. Looking up, Mr. Webb saw his stepson's face distorted by a horrible grimace. He heard a laugh. Then a small, awful pause. And then a thunderous crack.

II

"But the cockatoo, Jimmie?" said Mr. Dakin.

"Yes, the cockatoo," said Jimmie Garrett, hopelessly.

He looked gloomily about the iron-grilled enclosure in which he sat on a hard bench with his attorney in the Fairfield County jail. Mr. Dakin was a broad, tall man with a soft voice and a soft manner. He was slow of speech and movement, and he looked far from brilliant. Jimmie was drawn to him, but he did not know exactly why. Perhaps one reason was that Mr. Dakin believed him, while other lawyers had listened to him with cold incredulity.

"If we could explain what became of the cockatoo," said Mr. Dakin wistfully, "we might convince them that the rest of your story is true. We could make them believe that you went to Cedar Cove that afternoon with no other thought than to throw the money in Mr. Webb's face and tell him what you thought of him."

"It's true," declared Jimmie quietly.

"I know it, and that's the devil of it. Nothing is so hard to make a jury believe as the truth. If it wasn't for the pesky cockatoo we could—"

"And the bullet," Jimmie put in.

"Yes, and the bullet," said Mr. Dakin.

He paused before his client, legs spread wide apart, filling his pipe with white, pudgy fingers. His suit of mousey gray fitted badly. His face was large and soft and sallow. By rigid economy a single lock of hair had been made to cover a goodly portion of skull.

"If we could find the cockatoo and the bullet," he added plaintively, "then we might make the jury swallow the rest."

Jimmie nodded heavily.

"This is how your story will sound," said Mr. Dakin. "You thought Mr. Webb gave you a raw deal. You brooded over it in prison. That part was all right. He was a bit rough with you. A lot of people will sympathize

with you there. When you got out of prison you were like a boiler with its exhaust pipe plugged up. You had to blow off steam or bust. That's all right, too. Anybody can see you're hot-headed. You learned where your stepfather was located by going over Major Briggs's outgoing mail one day and finding a letter bearing Mr. Webb's forwarding address. Then you went to a friend and borrowed eight hundred dollars. You wanted to pay Mr. Webb back before you bawled him out. That's a good touch, Jimmie—about paying back the money. Up to that point your story will get across beautifully."

Mr. Dakin blew smoke through the bars of the iron enclosure.

"But the rest—" He wrinkled his long, florid nose, the only bright feature of his countenance. "The rest is all snags. You found Mr. Webb at his desk. Knobbetts was out. You threw the money down on the desk. A lot of red-hot phrases were blistering the lining of your brain, but you couldn't get 'em out. You were too mad. And the sight of Mr. Webb sitting there as calm as a judge made you all the madder. You wanted to see him wilt and shake, but he didn't even bat an eyelid. He just went on writing as unconcerned as if you hadn't been there. Cool, I'll tell the world! And his coolness made you all the hotter. You wanted to batter down his iron composure, but you couldn't even make a dent in it. It made you furious. You lost control of yourself. You grabbed the revolver and fired a shot, just to see if you couldn't make him jump. But you didn't fire the shot at him. You fired it— Think hard, Jimmie. Where did you fire it?"

Jimmie Garrett raised his head, a well-formed young head covered with thick yellow hair. His pale face grew taut with the strain of looking back upon a scene of tumult.

"I don't know," he mumbled. "It happened so quickly, and I must have been a little mad. But I didn't fire the shot at Mr. Webb. I can swear to that. I seemed to come partly to my senses when I heard the explosion. I ran

from the house, fearing I might be tempted to shoot again and—and—"

"And take aim, the second time," Mr. Dakin suggested.

"Yes, something like that. I couldn't trust myself. I just ran like mad, without stopping to look back."

"And you dropped the revolver as you ran?"

"I'm not sure." Jimmie pondered heavily. "I—it seems I threw the revolver out the window just after I fired the shot. But I'm not sure. It all seems like a crazy dream."

"And half an hour later," Mr. Dakin recited, hitching up his sagging trousers, "Knobbetts came home and found Mr. Webb dead on the floor. The revolver, with your finger-prints on the handle and showing that one shot had been recently fired from it, was found outside the window. The cockatoo was gone. The money had disappeared from the desk drawer. On the desk was a sheet of paper in Mr. Webb's handwriting saying you had come to him in an ugly mood, and that he feared you were after his life." He made a wry face. "It makes a nice little case for the State."

"Yes," said Jimmie, "and my precious record makes it all the blacker."

"The State will contend," said Mr. Dakin, "that you made away with the cockatoo because she recognized you and you were afraid she would talk. I understand that cockatoo would harp on a person's name for days after she'd seen him. She did recognize you, didn't she?"

"I believe so. I have a faint recollection that she spoke my name as I passed the window."

Mr. Dakin nodded gloomily. "That's where we are up against a hard one. You and I believe that a stranger —maybe the tramp Mr. Webb hired to saw wood— committed the murder soon after you left and took the money. It must have been very soon after, or Mr. Webb would have torn up what he wrote about you. But a stranger would have no motive for doing away with the cockatoo. Not unless he did it with the deliberate intention of throwing the guilt on you."

He sighed. It couldn't be said that Mr. Dakin was bubbling over with cheer. Yet he was not a pessimist. On the contrary, as Jimmie had learned, he was the sort of optimist who has to see the full extent of the gloomy side before he can turn to the bright one.

"Then there is the bullet," he went on. "A bullet was found in Mr. Webb's body. The State will contend that you fired it. We've got to admit that you fired a shot from Mr. Webb's revolver. There's no getting around that. But we deny that the shot you fired was the fatal one. Now, to uphold our contention, we've got to show what became of the bullet you fired. If it didn't lodge in Mr. Webb's body, it must have lodged somewhere else."

Jimmie stretched his legs and frowned. Time after time he had gone over this point with Mr. Dakin, but it was as baffling as ever.

"I've searched the room in which Mr. Webb was killed," added Mr. Dakin, "and so has the district attorney. There is no sign of a bullet anywhere. That leaves only one explanation. You must have fired the bullet out the window."

"Maybe I did," said Jimmie dully.

"Very probable," said Mr. Dakin. "You threw the revolver out the window. Very likely you fired the bullet in the same direction. We know the window was open that night. But now we come to another snag. It's a narrow window, and you were standing about six feet from it when you fired the shot. That didn't give the bullet a very wide range. I spent all yesterday afternoon experimenting, firing about a hundred shots from an air pistol. I stood exactly where you stood. When I aimed low, they struck the wide cobblestoned driveway that runs between the barn and the house. When I aimed high, they struck the eaves of the barn. Whichever way I fired, it was impossible to shoot beyond the barn. So the bullet you fired that night couldn't have gone very far. Yet I searched the entire range and didn't find even a scratch."

With a fretting air he puffed smoke from his pipe.

"There's the riddle," he concluded. "The bullet couldn't strike either the oak, the cobblestones or the barn without leaving a trace. Neither could it have dissolved in thin air. What became of it?"

"It's three weeks since it was fired," Jimmie observed. "A lot of things could have happened to it in the meantime."

"But the house and grounds were searched five hours after the murder," Mr. Dakin reminded him. "How carefully we don't know. Wish I had been on the case then. But one thing is sure. We've got to find either the cockatoo or the bullet. Both would be better. Without either we're lost."

Jimmie flung his cigaret away. It passed between the iron bars and landed in a brass cuspidor outside.

"Good shot," said Mr. Dakin.

He lowered his head in thought. Minutes passed in silence. A weary jail attendant came down the corridor with a stack of cuspidors under his arm. He carried away the one in which Jimmie's cigaret had fallen. Mr. Dakin followed him with heavy eyes until he was out of sight. Then he fixed the same heavy eyes on the point where the cuspidor had been.

"That's an idea," he mumbled absently.

Jimmie watched him curiously. Mr. Dakin turned slowly and looked at him. His eyes were narrow and contemplative.

"My mind works that way, Jimmie," he explained. "I see things that are farthest from my thoughts, and they start queer ideas in my brain. That cigaret now. You shot it straight into the cuspidor. But it isn't there now. It's gone."

Jimmie gave him a blank look. Mr. Dakin seemed to be stating the obvious thing with a very solemn air.

"It's far-fetched," he added, "but maybe the same thing happened to the bullet. You see, it's possible that your bullet lodged in some object that was afterward taken away, just as the cuspidor was taken away. It's just a hunch. But it would explain what became of the bullet."

"But it wouldn't explain what happened to the cockatoo or the money."

"No, it wouldn't. Might be worth thinking about, though. See you again tomorrow, Jimmie."

He placed his big, plump hand on Jimmie's shoulder, called the corridor guard, and walked out. Jimmie was taken back to his cell. He was in a lighter mood. It seemed as though the big and gloomy lawyer's touch on his shoulder had banished a load of worries.

When he returned at eleven o'clock the next morning there was a hint of excitement beneath Mr. Dakin's rustic exterior.

"Had another hunch last night," he casually announced. "Saw a man with a limp. It started an idea kicking around in my head."

"A man with a limp?"

"He limped pretty badly. It set me wondering whether a bullet had hit him in the leg or the foot at one time."

"Yes?" said Jimmie. He was growing accustomed to the lawyer's queer way of reasoning.

"That started me thinking about the missing bullet again," said Mr. Dakin. He crushed a leaf of tobacco between his great soft hands and filled his pipe. "I also thought about the tramp Mr. Webb put to work sawing wood. I put the two together—the tramp and the bullet. Or, rather, I put the bullet in the tramp."

"Eh?" said Jimmie, very dazed.

"We know the tramp had been around the house that day," Mr. Dakin explained. "Next morning he was gone. Maybe he was seized with wanderlust when Mr. Webb gave him a dollar. Or maybe that dollar gave him a taste for more dollars. Anyhow, maybe he was watching outside the window and saw you throw the money down on the desk. Maybe the bullet you fired landed in some fleshy part of his body. That frightened him, and he ran away. What's wrong with that?"

"By Jove!" Jimmie hoarsely exclaimed. "But in that case, wouldn't the tramp have left a trail of blood?"

"A heavy rain started in the evening," Mr. Dakin

pointed out. "It may have washed the blood away. I've notified all the hospitals and all the doctors within fifty miles to see if they have any record of a wounded tramp."

Jimmie's face shone a little, but he was not yet convinced.

"But that wouldn't explain who killed Mr. Webb," he remarked.

"No, but it would tend to prove that you didn't. If your bullet lodged in the tramp's anatomy, it couldn't have killed Mr. Webb?"

"And what about the cockatoo?"

"One thing at a time," said Mr. Dakin. He looked a little hurt over his client's failure to embrace the theory with greater enthusiasm. "Had a talk with Knobbetts this morning. It's queer nobody seems to have thought of Knobbetts in connection with this case."

"You don't think he killed Mr. Webb?"

"Well, there is just this about it, Jimmie. The cockatoo disappeared the night of the murder. The only sane explanation is that the murderer made away with her because he was afraid she would squeal on him. As far as we know, there were only three persons at Cedar Cove that night whom the cockatoo knew by name. One of 'em is dead. The other two were Knobbetts and you."

He glanced at his watch. His pudgy face lengthened a little.

"The darned thing has stopped," he announced. "Must have forgotten to wind—"

He paused and gazed down at the dial. "By gosh," he exclaimed.

Jimmie watched him. Something, he knew, had been suggested to Mr. Dakin's mind by the stopping of the timepiece.

"Knobbetts said he thought the timer on the Ford had given out when he was half-way between the village and Cedar Cove," the lawyer mumbled. "Said he walked back to the village and got a new one. But when he got back to the car with it he couldn't get it to run. Some-

thing else was evidently the trouble, so he had to leave the Ford in the road and walk home. That's how he explained why he was late returning. Nobody has thought of checking up on him."

Slowly and thoughtfully he wound his watch. That finished, he looked absently at Jimmie.

"Between the tramp and Knobbetts," he said, "we may find the murderer."

It appeared, however, that he had been wrong in this forecast. The doctors and the hospitals had no record of a wounded tramp. Inquiries at the garage substantiated that part of Knobbetts' story having to do with the purchase of a new timer for the Ford. The fate of Madam Katoo remained an unsolved mystery. No trace was found of the bullet. Jimmie could tell from Mr. Dakin's looks and manner that things were going badly.

"Our luck will turn," said the lawyer. "Don't worry."

But their luck had not turned when the case of the State versus James Garrett was called. Things had progressed rapidly, for the grand jury had happened to be in session when the crime occurred and the regular term of the district court had opened soon afterward. Mr. Dakin had fought for delay, but without success. Jimmie, feeling rather overwhelmed, watched the gradual filling of the jury-box and then listened for three and a half days to the presentation of the State's evidence. He heard Knobbetts, one of the prosecution's witnesses, denounce him as a wastrel and a thief. His visit to Cedar Cove and the episode in Mr. Webb's study were emphasized in the most damaging manner. He could see the jury seize eagerly upon the two circumstances of the missing cockatoo and the bullet. These were things that appealed to their imagination.

"They're eating it up," remarked Mr. Dakin, during a recess. "It's all circumstantial, of course, but—" He rubbed his long, bright nose and looked down at his notes.

Against his protest the jurors were taken out to Cedar Cove to visit the scene of the crime and see for them-

selves how impossible it would have been for the defendant to fire a bullet in such a manner that no trace of it could be found. Mr. Baines, the district attorney, a small man with an astounding pompadour and ferocious eyes, looked well pleased after the expedition.

Jimmie, called to the stand by his attorney, felt a little overawed at first, with the unfriendly eyes of twelve good men and true upon him. His eyes would stray occasionally to exhibit number one, the revolver that had ended his stepfather's life, and which was now lying in plain sight on the table just below the judge's bench. But Mr. Dakin knew how to make him feel at ease. By and by he could look the jurors straight in the eyes, as he had been counseled to do. Under the big man's soft-voiced questions he related how, in prison, he had brooded over his stepfather's harsh treatment, how resentment and hate had sprung up within him, and how he had looked forward to the day when he could go to Mr. Webb and ease his pent-up rancor by flinging the stolen money in his stepfather's face and pouring red-hot words on his head.

Mr. Dakin questioned him at length upon his mood when he left prison—a foolish mood, but a very human one. He brought out how Jimmie had gone to a friend and borrowed money with which to repay what he had stolen. At the end of the long examination, Jimmie felt that much had been gained. The jurors looked less hostile. Even juror number seven, who for a time had listened with an expression of sour incredulity, seemed impressed.

"You may have the witness," said Mr. Dakin to the district attorney.

Like an impatient bull pup suddenly unleashed, Mr. Baines jumped to his feet. His pompadour waggled as he strode menacingly toward the witness. He snatched up exhibit number one and held it close to Jimmie's eyes.

"Garrett, you held this revolver in your hand the night your stepfather was murdered?"

"I did," said Jimmie frankly, having been counseled to speak with candor in matters beyond dispute.

"You threatened him with it?"

"I tried to frighten him."

"You fired a shot from it?"

"That's true."

"Yet you have denied under oath that you shot your stepfather. If you didn't will you explain to the jury what became of the bullet?"

"I can't."

"You know that the scene of the crime, as well as the ground outside the window, was searched a few hours after the murder?"

"So I have been told."

"And that no bullet was found, or any trace of a bullet?"

"So I understand."

"Well, then"—Mr. Baines ran his fingers through his pompadour and paused briefly for rhetorical effect—"can you explain in any convincing manner how a bullet fired under such circumstances, and from the position you occupied when you fired it, could disappear completely?"

"No, I can't."

Mr. Baines paused to let the answer sink in, then went on in a gentler tone:

"You know, don't you, Garrett, that the bullet you fired was afterward extracted from Mr. Webb's body?"

Mr. Dakin, a little slow as usual, was on his feet with an objection. It was sustained, but the damage had been done. The district attorney consulted his notes, and then came rapid-fire questions concerning the missing cockatoo. Very deftly he emphasized the point, already implanted in the minds of the jurors, that the only conceivable explanation for the cockatoo's disappearance was to be found in the murderer's fear that she would betray him.

Then Mr. Baines' manner changed; there was a little purr in his voice.

"Garrett, you have told the jury how you went to a friend and borrowed money to pay back what you stole. You knew that your stepfather was fairly well off, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"You knew that the theft of a few hundred dollars meant nothing to a man in his position?"

"Yes."

"Then why were you in such a hurry to repay what you had stolen? Couldn't you have waited till you could earn the money and didn't have to borrow it?"

"I wanted to tell Mr. Webb to his face what I thought of him, and I didn't feel I could do it till I had paid him back."

"Oh, so that's it!" Mr. Baines' tone was still gentleness itself. "You wanted to go to him with a clean breast. Was that your only reason?"

"Yes, the only one."

"The *only* one, Garrett?" His tone and manner conveyed worlds of meaning.

Jimmie felt bewildered. What was the prosecutor driving at? Then, glancing over the jury-box, he caught a thin, knowing grin on the face of juror number seven. In a moment Mr. Baines' innuendo was clear. Very subtly he had sought to instil the suggestion in the minds of the jurors that the defendant's real purpose had been to create a favorable impression and an appearance of innocence.

"Positively," said Jimmie, but he knew it sounded flat.

"That's all," said Mr. Baines, waving his hand complacently; and then court adjourned for the day.

The defense fared no better the following day. Mr. Dakin called character witnesses, questioning each at such great length that Jimmie suspected he was merely sparring for time. Things were going badly for Mr. Dakin. Mr. Baines succeeded in discrediting much of the evidence intended to build up a character for a man just out of prison. At one point, during the testimony of the young friend from whom Jimmie had borrowed the money, he sauntered to the exhibits table and absently picked up the sheet of paper on which the dead man had recorded his belief that his stepson was capable of murder. It seemed a very casual act, but the effect was not lost.

"We aren't licked yet," was the most optimistic comment Mr. Dakin had to offer when he saw his client in the iron-grilled enclosure that evening.

He lowered his big head and played with his watch-chain.

"The things that worry me most are the cockatoo and the bullet," he grumbled. "It's the kind of stuff that appeals to a jury. Baines has hammered it into their heads so hard they can't see anything else. The bullet and the fool cockatoo are his strongest points."

Jimmie nodded gloomily.

"There isn't much time," said Mr. Dakin. "The case will go to the jury tomorrow afternoon. Hang it all, Jimmie, we've simply got to find that bullet. Or else the cockatoo. Unless we do—"

It was a curious sort of pause. The words merely ceased and hung suspended, as if Mr. Dakin's vocal cords had suddenly snapped. He was gazing toward the window, kinky brows drawn up, his head at a slant, a queer intentness in his sallow face.

"By heck, Jimmie!"

Jimmie followed his gaze, but all he could see was a pigeon with gray and faintly purplish plumage strutting pertly on the window ledge. It was just an ordinary pigeon, yet the lawyer stared at it as if the bird's sleek wings sheltered the answer to all his perplexities.

"Gosh!" he said, "why didn't I think of that before?"

The bird, as if resenting his rude stare, flapped her wings and soared away.

"What?" Jimmie asked.

"You saw that pigeon, didn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

The lawyer reached for his hat.

"I've got another hunch, Jimmie. It's a sure-fire one this time, I think. Good news for you in the morning. So long."

Jimmie stared at him as he bustled out. He smiled faintly. There was something a little ludicrous about Mr. Dakin's excitement.

The atmosphere of the court-room seemed to have changed overnight when he took his seat beside Mr. Dakin the next morning. The jurors looked as hostile as before, but Mr. Baines seemed very repressed and subdued. Mr. Dakin looked rather worn, also a little shabbier than usual, but there was an air of quiet exaltation about his big frame.

"Baines and I have just had a conference with the judge *in camera*," he whispered.

Jimmie tingled. The lawyer's excitement, though repressed, was infectious. In front of him lay a huge parcel roughly done up in newspaper. Jimmie was curious to know what it contained, but the judge entered just then, and he gave Jimmie a queer look as he took his high seat.

"Knobbetts," called Mr. Dakin.

There was a little stir in the back of the room. Knobbetts, in garments that might have been handed down to him from his late employer, and with a look of faint surprise on his long face, took the witness stand.

"Knobbetts," began Mr. Dakin pleasantly, "I have a few more questions to ask you. You have told the jury that Mr. Webb brought a considerable amount of money with him to Cedar Cove. Exactly how much did he bring?"

"About a thousand dollars, sir. He meant to stay several months, and he wanted to have enough for running expenses. He explained that he didn't wish to open an account in the village because he didn't want people to know where he was."

"I see. So he brought a thousand dollars in cash. With the amount Garrett brought that afternoon, that made nearly eighteen hundred dollars. By the way, Knobbetts, how much did Mr. Webb pay you?"

"Eighty dollars a month."

"And you have been investing every penny of your savings in stocks?"

"Yes, sir," said Knobbetts a little uneasily, casting a quick glance at the parcel lying in front of the lawyer.

"You have always been thrifty, haven't you, Knobbetts? You believe in making every penny count?"

"Well, I think it's a good idea, sir," said Knobbetts virtuously.

"Excellent, Knobbetts. Now, you have testified that you drove to the village about two o'clock on the day of the murder. You had trouble with the car and had to walk part of the way back, so you did not return to Cedar Cove until half-past five or six. Couldn't you be a little more explicit as to the time?"

"No, sir, I don't believe I can. In the excitement of finding Mr. Webb dead I didn't notice the time."

"That's natural enough. Are you sure, though, that Mr. Webb was dead when you returned?"

The witness winced a little at this peculiar question. "Oh, quite sure, sir."

"Tell the jury again what you did when you found Mr. Webb's body."

"I ran to a telephone and notified the village authorities."

"You had to go on foot?"

"Oh, yes, the car was out of commission."

"How far did you have to run?"

"About a mile and a half. There was no telephone nearer than that."

"You must have been out of breath. Then you went back to Cedar Cove and waited for the officers. They were slow in arriving, I understand. How long did you have to wait?"

"About half an hour."

"And what did you do?"

"Just waited, sir."

"Did you see anything of the cockatoo?"

"No, sir, but I didn't give her a thought. I was too upset over the murder."

"Of course," Mr. Dakin nodded affably. "What about the tramp? See anything of him?"

"No, I didn't see him either."

"Well, I understand Mr. Webb had given him some

money earlier in the day. Probably Cedar Cove couldn't hold him after that. Did you see Jimmie Garrett?"

"No, sir."

"So you were alone in the house for half an hour. Did you stay inside all the time?"

"Yes, sir. It had started to rain quite hard."

"You didn't take a walk to while away the time? There's a queer rock formation about a third of a mile from the house, I understand. It's called Gideon's Pulpit. There's a path winding to it along the shore, and part of it leads over a surface of reddish clay, making it very slippery in a rain. You didn't happen to walk in that direction?"

A wave of pallor swept Knobbetts' long face. He gripped the arms of the witness stand.

"No," sullenly. "I've told you I didn't walk anywhere."

"Do you always tell the truth, Knobbetts?"

The witness looked at the district attorney as if expecting an objection to such questioning, but none came. Knobbetts gave a shrug for an answer.

"By the way, Knobbetts," said Mr. Dakin softly, "have you ever owned a revolver?"

"A revolver? Never, sir. Not recently, that is. Not in a good many years."

Jimmie, growing more and more excited, looked at Mr. Dakin. The lawyer's round, flabby face was ostentatiously artless.

"Think hard, Knobbetts. Didn't you discover by accident one day that Mr. Webb owned a revolver? Didn't it strike you that a revolver was a good thing to have, and didn't you go and buy one just like Mr. Webb's, thinking it might come in handy some day?"

The witness gave his questioner a long, trembling stare.

"No, sir!" he shouted. "I never—"

"No use getting excited, Knobbetts. Let me see, you have a sister living somewhere, haven't you?"

"Yes," said Knobbetts, fidgeting and moistening his lips. "She lives in Bradford."

Mr. Dakin nodded. "That's about forty miles from here, isn't it? I understand your sister is in poor circumstances. Now and then you have been sending her parcels containing articles you have picked up around Mr. Webb's house—nothing of very great value and nothing that Mr. Webb would be likely to miss. Isn't that so?"

The witness mopped his face with his handkerchief.

"I never took anything without Mr. Webb's permission," he protested.

"Perhaps not. Your sister would sell the articles, and you would go fifty-fifty on the proceeds. Generally you sent them in paper parcels. But the last batch you sent her was in a suitcase. The suitcase was locked, and you forgot to send her the key, so she didn't open it. You didn't intend she should open it, did you?"

Knobbetts' labored breathing could be heard all over the tense court-room. He twisted his neck and moved his lips, but no words came.

"And so," said Mr. Dakin, "the suitcase wasn't opened until I ran out to Bradford last night and called on your sister. By the way, Knobbetts, you sent the suitcase the day after Mr. Webb was murdered and the same day Garrett was arrested. Isn't that true?"

"No!" cried Knobbetts in a thin, cracked voice. "I see what you're driving at. It isn't true. It's all lies!"

Very calmly Mr. Dakin opened the parcel on the table. He exhibited a revolver. "Recognize it, Knobbetts?"

The witness shuddered convulsively. Mr. Dakin exhibited a pair of rough shoes.

"Recognize them, Knobbetts?" No answer, only a hoarse, inarticulate stutter. "You tried to clean them, but you were in a hurry and didn't do a very good job. There was still bits of caked reddish clay around the heels and in the seams around the soles. You must have taken a walk to Gideon's Pulpit, after all. There's no red clay anywhere else in the neighborhood of Cedar Cove. Why did you go there, Knobbetts?"

Still Knobbetts had no answer. He merely twisted in his chair and glared now and then at the lawyer.

"Your honor," said Mr. Dakin, "I move that the indictment against my client be dismissed. The murderer sits in this chair. Garrett is absolutely innocent. Last night I found the cockatoo and the bullet of which the prosecution has made so much. I found the cockatoo where Knobbetts buried it near Gideon's Pulpit—and the bullet was in the cockatoo."

Mr. Dakin could not resist making a dramatic gesture as he added the last seven words. Jimmie started out of his chair, then sat down again. A buzzing went around the court-room. There was rapping for order.

"It's not for me to explain what happened," said Mr. Dakin modestly. He looked a little taller and broader as he stood before the bench. "I might offer a theory, though. The cockatoo was in the habit of flying in and out of her cage, sometimes perching in the oak just outside the window. She sat in the oak when Garrett fired the shot. The bullet lodged against her breast-bone. Knobbetts was standing outside the window. He saw Garrett give Mr. Webb the money and, a few minutes later, run excitedly from the house. A devil flew into Knobbetts. He has always been greedy. He wanted the eighteen hundred dollars in the desk, and he knew Mr. Webb would not give up the money without a fight. It took him only a minute to go to his room and get his revolver and shoot Mr. Webb dead. He knew Garrett would be accused of the crime, that all the circumstances would point to Garrett as the murderer. But Knobbetts added one more circumstance when he buried the cockatoo. Garrett, had he been the cold-blooded murderer the State has tried to make him out, would have done just that."

His honor looked at the wretched figure in the witness chair. Then he looked at Jimmie Garrett, a little dazed, but with a straight gaze and a fine bearing.

"The court will take the motion under advisement," he announced. "Officer, you will place this witness under arrest. Defendant is released in custody of counsel."

Mr. Dakin placed his great soft paw on Jimmie's shoulder.

"Well, Jimmie, we've won."

"Thanks to you," said Jimmie.

"No." Mr. Dakin's heavy eyes strayed for a moment to the window-sill. "Thanks to the pigeon."

FREEMAN WILLS CROFTS

THE GREUZE GIRL

Mr. Nicholas Lumley, commission agent, laid his fountain pen on his desk, straightened himself up with a sigh of relief, and glanced at his watch. To his satisfaction, it told him that the close of what had been a hard day's work had been reached, and that in a few moments he must leave his office if he wished to catch his usual train home.

But Fate ruled otherwise. As he rose from his desk an office boy entered and laid a card before him. It appeared that Mr. Silas S. Snaith, of 105, Hall's Building, Broadway, N. Y., wished to see him.

"Show him in," said Mr. Lumley, stifling a sigh of disappointment.

Mr. Snaith proved to be a tall, slim man of some five-and-thirty, with clear-cut, strongly-marked features and two very keen blue eyes, which danced over Mr. Lumley and about the room as if to leave no detail of either unnoticed. He was well dressed in dark clothes of American cut, but an ornate watch-chain, ruby tie-pin, and diamond sleeve-links seemed to point to a larger endowment of money than of taste. In his hand he carried a leather dispatch-case of unusually large dimensions, which he placed carefully on the floor beside the chair to which Mr. Lumley pointed.

"Mr. Nicholas Lumley?" he began, speaking with a drawl and slight American accent. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

He held out his hand, which Mr. Lumley shook, murmuring his acknowledgments.

The other seated himself.

(By permission of the author, Freeman Wills Crofts.)

"You take on jobs for other people, I reckon," he said, "odd jobs—for a consideration?"

Mr. Lumley admitted the impeachment.

"Why, then, I'd like if you would take on one for me. It's a short job, and easy in a way, and if you can put it through there'll be quite a little commission."

"What is the job, Mr. Snaith?"

"It'll take a minute or two to tell you. But, first, you'll understand it's confidential."

"Certainly. Most of my work is that."

There was a hint of coldness in Mr. Lumley's voice which the other sensed.

"That's all right. No need to get rattled. Have a cigar?"

He pulled two from his waistcoat-pocket, holding one out. Mr. Lumley accepted, and both men lit up.

"It's this way," went on Snaith. "I'm in lumber, and I've not done too badly—house in Fifth Avenue and all that. I've more spare time than I had, and you mightn't believe it, but the hobby I'm fondest of is pictures. I've toured Europe for the galleries alone, and a mighty fine time I had. And my own collection runs to quite a few dollars.

"A year last fall I struck a picture that fairly licked anything I'd seen before—at Poictiers, in France—and when I left that town the picture came too. It cost me a cool 15,000 dollars, but it was worth it. It was a Greuze, a small thing, not more than ten inches by a foot—just a girl's head—but a fair wonder. The man I bought it from told me it was one of a pair, and since that I've been looking out for the other one. And now, by the Lord, I've found it!"

Mr. Snaith paused and drew on his cigar, which he held pipewise in the corner of his mouth.

"I went up to see your Lord Arthur Wentworth this trip—Wentworth Hall, Durham. My word, that's some place! I had business with him about some acres of trees; he holds land in N'York State. Well, he had to go to some other room to get a map of his do-mains, and I had a

look round the study to pass the time till he came back —idle curiosity, as you might say. Well, I'll be beat to a frazzle if there, on the wall behind where I'd been sitting, wasn't hanging the companion picture; I'd seen photographs of it, so I knew. I reckoned it might be only a copy, so I nipped up and had a thorough good squint at it before his lordship came back. I thought it was the genu-ine thing, but I just wasn't plumb sure.

"I had time to take a couple of snaps of it with my pocket kodak before his lordship came back. Then we got the lumber deal through. For all he's a member of the effete British aristocracy, and about as ro-bust as a wisp of hay at that, he's all awake is Lord Arthur. A hard nut, as maybe you'll find.

"I said nothing about the picture, but all the time I was figuring how to get wise to its genu-ineness. When I got back to London I went to the best man I knew in the trade—Frank L. Mitchell, of Pall Mall. What Frank L. Mitchell doesn't know about pictures wouldn't be worth hearing. I had him promise to go down and see the picture for me.

"He went the next day. He waited about till he saw his lordship and friends start out on a gunning stunt, then he went to the house and, with lubricating the butler's palm, got a look round inside. He saw the picture, and he's satisfied it's the real article. But he went one better than that. The holders of all these genu-ine pictures are known, and when he got back he looked up the records, and found that when the present lord's father purchased it fifty years ago it was recognised to be the real thing, and paid for as such.

"So that's bed rock. It's likely the present owner knows that, but, of course, it's not certain. Mitchell figures that bit of canvas is worth three thousand of your pounds—15,000 dollars. Now, Mr. Lumley, I want that picture, and I want you to get it for me."

The American sat back and looked expectantly at Mr. Lumley. The latter's interest, which had been aroused by his visitor's story, suddenly waned.

"That's easier said than done, I'm afraid," he answered slowly. "Ten to one his lordship won't sell."

"I reckon he'll sell—on my terms. Note the connection." Mr. Snaith demonstrated on his fingers. "Here you have a lord that's hard up—I got wise to that. It takes him all he can do to keep his end up. Three thousand may not be much, but it's a darned sight more than he can afford to drop for nothing. You say he'll not sell. I'll agree, and ask, Why not? Why, because he's a proud man. He's not going to have that space on his study wall to remind him and his friends and his servants what he's done. But that's where I come in."

Mr. Snaith picked up his dispatch case and, opening it carefully, drew out a tissue-covered object and laid it on Mr. Lumley's desk. With thin, nervous fingers he unwrapped the paper, revealing to the commission agent's astonished gaze a small oil painting in a heavy and elaborate gilt frame.

It was a charming study of a girl's head; light, elegant, dainty work. She was beautiful; blue-eyed, creamy-complexioned, and with masses of red-gold hair. But it was not her beauty that held the observer. It was the soul which shone behind the face. She was looking up eagerly into the distance, with a half smile on her lips, as if at a vision of heaven or of love. Mr. Lumley gazed in admiration.

"Warm stuff," murmured Snaith appreciatively, "and that's only a copy. The picture's celebrated the world over, and there's scores of copies. It's so good. is this one" —he shot a sidelong glance at Mr. Lumley—"*I* can hardly tell it isn't genu-ine, and I doubt if you or Lord Wentworth could either."

Mr. Lumley felt slightly uncomfortable, though he could not say exactly why. But something faintly unpleasant in his visitor's manner grated on his rather sensitive nerves.

"Now, my proposition is this," the American went on. "You see his lordship and show him this picture. Tell him straight it's a copy, but so good a copy that only a

few men in the world could tell the difference. That he'll be able to see for himself. Tell him your client offers him £2,000 down to let you change the pictures."

"Why not deal with him yourself?"

"Two reasons. First, he don't love me any over that lumber deal. He was polite and all that, but I could sense he was glad to see my back. Second, I have business in Paris to-morrow, and I'll only have time to call here passing through London on my way to the States next Friday."

Mr. Lumley did not reply, and Snaith continued, speaking earnestly:

"He'll do it, for he wants the money. Note how it would seem to him. No one will know anything about it, and the new picture will look the same as the other, and if the question ever does come up, it will be supposed a mistake was made fifty years ago when his father bought it. His pride will be saved. And if two thousand doesn't raise him, why you can offer him three. I just must have the thing, and I don't mind a hundred or two one way or another. Your own fee, if you put it through, to be what you name—say £200 and expenses—that is, if you think that's enough."

"Enough?" cried Mr. Lumley. "More than enough."

"That's all right. Then I reckon you'll take it on? Now about *bona fides*. I've inquired about you before I came here, and what I've heard has satisfied me. But you know nothing of me, so you'll likely want some money instead of an introduction. As a guarantee of good faith I'll hand you notes for £2,000. If the deal comes to more you can pay it. You'll have the picture as security, and you can hold it till I pay you the balance. That all right?"

Mr. Lumley thought rapidly. The business appeared simple and straightforward and, so far as he could see, square. At all events his part of it was square. He would be perfectly open with Lord Arthur, and he would honestly try to effect the sale. He could but fail.

"That seems very fair, Mr. Snaith. I'll do what I can."

"Good. Then count those."

The visitor took a roll of notes from his pocket and, dividing them, handed a bundle to his new agent. There were twenty of them, Bank of England notes, each value £100.

"Correct," said Mr. Lumley as he scribbled a receipt.

"There are two other things," Snaith went on. "First, I don't want my name mentioned to Lord Wentworth. As I say, we got across each other over that lumber deal, and there's no kind of sense in putting his back up at the start. Just say a rich American wants it. And next, note my movements for the next three days. I cross tonight to Paris, and the Hotel Angleterre will find me till Friday morning. I cross Friday, call here at 6 p.m. for the picture, and leave Euston by the American boat train at seven. Got that?"

"I follow you," answered Mr. Lumley. "That gives me two days. I'll keep your case to carry the picture."

When the American left Mr. Lumley remained seated at his desk, his mind busy with the somewhat unusual commission with which he had been entrusted. But there was a peculiar feature in this case. That idea of substituting the copy was new to his experience. But it was certainly ingenious, and if Lord Arthur were really hard up, it was conceivable that it might tempt him to agree to the proposal. But apart from this novel feature, the matter seemed reasonable and above board enough. And yet Mr. Lumley was not satisfied. He was, or believed himself to be, a judge of character, and all his instincts had bade him beware of this Snaith. He felt that it behoved him to be on his guard, and stories he had read of confidence tricks recurred vaguely to his memory.

But he had undertaken the task, and it now no longer mattered whether he had been wise or foolish; he must get on with it. He saw that he had no time to lose, and eleven o'clock that night, therefore, found him moving out of King's Cross *en route* for the north. But like

the king of old, his thoughts troubled him and he could not sleep. Whether it was due to the rather heavy supper he had eaten—Mr. Lumley was slightly dyspeptic—he did not know, but a feeling of depression and foreboding weighed on his spirits.

Suddenly an idea shot into his mind. Those notes—Snaith had parted with them so easily—*were they forgeries?* Feverishly he took them from his pocket and examined them. No, they seemed all right. But, he determined, he would make sure. His first business in the morning would be to call at a bank in Durham and have them tested.

And then a possible meaning of Snaith's actions flashed before him—a real thing before which his half nightmarish imaginings vanished as if they had never been. As the idea sank into his horrified brain, Nicholas Lumley began to know temptation.

He had believed that the American's offer was a £200 commission on the completion of a sale. But he saw now that he had been mistaken. No sale had been contemplated. The thing was hideously clear. He had been offered, not £200, but £2,200—£3,200—any sum almost that he liked to name—to *steal the picture!*

And, merciful heavens, how easy it would be! He had only to devise some scheme to get to the study with his case, and arrange something—a telephone call, for example—to get his lordship out of the room. Twenty seconds would do the whole thing. He could change the pictures, complete his business, leave without haste, and—— Three thousand two hundred pounds! Perhaps four thousand!

Four thousand pounds! Four thousand pounds skilfully invested meant anything up to £250 a year. Mr. Lumley was not a rich man, and an additional £250 would just make the difference between continuous, wearing economy and ease.

Mr. Lumley groaned, as he wiped the cold sweat off his forehead.

And Snaith would say nothing. He would perhaps smile knowingly, but he would pay and take his picture and go.

He wrestled with it all night, and next morning his face was white and grim and set as he sallied forth from the hotel in which he had breakfasted in search of a bank. Here one of his fears was disposed of. The notes were genuine.

An hour later he stepped out of a taxi at the door of Wentworth Hall. On requesting an interview with his lordship, he was shown into a small sitting-room and asked to wait. After some minutes he was here joined by Lord Arthur, an elderly man, thin and a little stooped, whose face was lined as if from care and suffering.

He looked like a man with an incurable disease, to whom life is a continuous burden. But there was no trace of bitterness about him, and his manner as he waved Mr. Lumley to a chair was not only courteous in the extreme, but even kindly.

"I am a commission agent, as you may have seen from my card, Lord Arthur," began Mr. Lumley, "and I have called on behalf of a wealthy American client, to lay before you a proposal which I sincerely trust you will not consider objectionable. May I say, as explaining my own position, that I have been offered a handsome commission—no less than £200—if my client's wishes can be met? You will understand, therefore"—Mr. Lumley smiled slightly—"how much I hope you will see your way at least to give the proposal your full consideration."

Lord Arthur seemed pleased by his visitor's candour.

"I will certainly do that," he replied pleasantly. "What does your client want?"

For answer Mr. Lumley opened the dispatch-case and took from it Mr. Snaith's picture.

"Good gracious!" cried Lord Arthur when the tissue-paper had been unrolled. "My Greuze! How did you get that?" He looked sharply and with some suspicion at his visitor.

Mr. Lumley hastened to assuage his fears.

"It is not yours, Lord Arthur. It is only a copy. But I wish you would tell me what you think of it."

The old gentleman bent over the frame.

"If I had not your assurance, I should swear it was mine," he said at last. "Why, the very frame is identical. Bring it into the study and let us compare."

Mr. Lumley, having folded back the paper and replaced the frame in its case, followed the owner of the house to a large, well-furnished, airy room, giving on the terrace before the entrance. Lord Arthur closed the door and directed his visitor's attention to the wall above the fireplace.

Though he knew what to expect, the latter could scarcely refrain from a start of astonishment, for there, to all intents and purposes, hung the veritable picture which had been given to him by Snaith.

"Put yours beside it," Lord Arthur directed.

Mr. Lumley obeyed, and held his picture on the wall next the other. Both men gazed in silence. The two seemed absolutely identical; the most minute examination even of the very frames failed to discover any difference between them.

"I shouldn't have believed it," Lord Arthur said after a prolonged scrutiny; and then indicating a deep armchair before the fire, "But sit down, won't you, and tell me all about it."

Mr. Lumley slipped his copy back in the case and sat down.

"My client," he explained, "is an enthusiastic collector. He has recently purchased the companion to this, and he is keenly anxious to get the original of this one also. He wondered whether by any chance you could be induced so far to oblige him as to accept this copy, together with whatever sum you cared to name—he suggested £2,000—but whatever you thought fair, in exchange for the original."

Lord Arthur stared.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed, "this is a very extraordinary business." He sat in thought for a few moments; then, with a little sidelong glance, asked:

"Suppose I said three thousand?"

"If you think that a fair figure, I am authorised to pay it."

His lordship made a gesture of surprise.

"Extraordinary!" he repeated. "And how does your client know that my picture is the original?"

"That, unfortunately, I cannot explain to your lordship, as I am not in his confidence. But I may say that he seemed perfectly satisfied on the point."

"It's more than I am. I may tell you that I have always regarded that picture—my own, I mean—as a copy. And I don't think, even if it were the original, that it would be worth anything like what you say. My knowledge of pictures, I admit, is but slight, still I should say that a thousand would be its outside price."

"Then, Lord Arthur," interjected Mr. Lumley with a smile, "would you allow me to change it for a thousand pounds?"

"I didn't say that. What I meant was that I should like an explanation of what seems to me a very peculiar proposal, to put it mildly. A man comes to me and offers me for a copy of a picture at least twice the outside value of the original. It sounds queer on the face of it, doesn't it?"

"But, Lord Arthur, you must remember that in such a case the intrinsic value of the picture may not represent its reasonable price. It may have an additional sentimental value. It may be an heirloom. You might not care to hang anything but an original on your walls. These are considerations which my client took into account. That they have a cash value would be recognised in any court of law."

"Quite true," Lord Arthur admitted. "And," he went on drily, "bearing these points in mind, suppose I accept your £2,000 for my copy, would you be satisfied?"

"More than satisfied. I should be grateful."

"You said you had the money there?"

For answer Mr. Lumley laid the twenty £100 notes on the table. Lord Arthur took them up.

"You will excuse me, I'm sure, but the matter is so

very extraordinary that I think I am entitled to ask, How do I know that these are genuine, and, if genuine, are not stolen?"

"Perfectly entitled, Lord Arthur. I would suggest that you send a man with them to your bank, and let the matter stand over until you receive his report."

Lord Arthur did not reply, but, moving over to his table, he wrote for a few seconds.

"Sign that, and you may take the picture," he said.

The document read:

> "Received from Lord Arthur Wentworth, Wentworth Hall, the copy of Greuze's 'Une Jeune Fille' which up to now has hung on his study wall, in return for the copy of the same picture supplied him by the undersigned on this date, and in consideration of the sum of two thousand pounds (£2,000), which has been paid in Bank of England £100 notes, numbered A61753E to A61772E."

"I don't want to take your client's money on false pretences," Lord Arthur went on, "so if within a month he has satisfied himself that he has bought a copy, I will refund him his £2,000 and his picture on his returning my own. If he likes to pay this money for the exchange, I do not see why I should not accept it. But you must warn him from me that I think he is in error, and the responsibility must be his alone. At all events, may I say I think you have fairly earned your commission."

Mr. Lumley, having expressed his gratitude and satisfaction, signed the receipt for the picture, obtained another for the money, exchanged the pictures, packed his purchase in the case, and, greatly rejoicing, took his leave. He felt he had successfully carried out his commission while preserving his honour, and on both counts he was pleased.

As he sat smoking in the afternoon express to King's Cross, he wondered idly which of them—Snaith or Lord Arthur—held the correct view about the picture. In

any case, it did not matter very much to him, Lumley. He had done what he was asked, he would give Snaith a true account of what had happened, claim his commission, and, so far as he was concerned, the incident would be closed.

And then occurred one of those singular coincidences which are supposed to take place only in books, but which, as a matter of fact, happen more frequently in real life. It chanced that at Grantham, Dobbs, the R.A., got into the compartment which up till then Mr. Lumley had occupied in solitary state. Now, Lumley had played golf with Dobbs, and the two were on friendly terms.

They conversed on general topics for some minutes, and then it occurred to Mr. Lumley that it would be interesting to get Dobbs' opinion of the Greuze. He therefore opened his case and produced the picture.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, as he handed it over.

"Too dark to say," returned the other, "but it looks a jolly fine copy."

"A copy?"

"A copy, yes. It's a well-known picture. Unless," the R.A. smiled, "unless you are just back from a burglarious expedition to Paris, the original is still in the Louvre."

Mr. Lumley gasped.

"I suppose, Dobbs," he said earnestly, "you're sure about that?"

"Of course I'm sure. Everyone knows that who knows anything at all of pictures. Why, I remember the exact place on the wall where it hung. I've looked at it scores of times. You didn't by any chance think it was an original?"

"I know nothing about it, but I bought it for a man who thought so."

"H'm. How much, if it's a fair question?"

"Two thousand."

The R.A. stared.

"Good Lord, man!" he cried, "you're not serious? The original of that picture is worth, perhaps, £1,200. This"—

he tapped the painting on his knee—"is worth, well, say £40 at the outside limit."

Mr. Lumley felt the bottom dropping out of his world.

"I don't understand the thing any more than you do," he answered slowly. "I was commissioned to buy this particular picture. I was told I might give two thousand or three, or practically anything that was asked, but I was to get the thing."

"I suppose it was a confidential deal?"

"Well, yes, I'm afraid so, but it would not be a breach of confidence to say it was for an American of the *nouveau riche* type."

Dobbs tossed his head contemptuously.

"That explains it," he said with a short laugh. And then the talk drifted into other channels.

But though Mr. Lumley felt no responsibility for a mistake, had such been made, there still remained in his mind an uneasy feeling about the whole affair. And later on that same evening he made a discovery which perturbed him still further.

He was wrestling with the problem of how Snaith, a man who had visited most of the galleries of Europe, could have failed to know that the original was in the Louvre. And then he recollected that this puzzle was not confined to the American. Snaith had not trusted his own judgment. He had consulted the best authority on pictures of whom he knew in London—Mitchell, of Pall Mall. Mitchell's name was unfamiliar to Mr. Lumley, but at all events he must be an authority, and—Mitchell had not known either.

He wondered what kind of standing Mitchell possessed, and, after reaching his office and locking up the dispatch-case in his safe, he took up his directory to see if he could gain any light on the point. And he did, but not the kind of light he expected. There was no one in Pall Mall of that name!

Mr. Lumley whistled. From experiencing a slight dissatisfaction he was now thoroughly uneasy. It certainly looked as if something were wrong.

He locked his office and, with a feeling of gratified surprise at the manner in which he was rising to an unexpected emergency, he drove to one of the large hotels on the Embankment much frequented by wealthy Americans. Here he was able to borrow a directory of New York. He looked up Snaith. There was no Silas S. Snaith mentioned either in Fifth Avenue or anywhere else. He looked up Hall's Building in Broadway. The name did not appear.

"Hoaxed!" Mr. Lumley whispered to himself as he wiped the perspiration off his forehead. "The whole thing's a plant. There is no Snaith. There is no Mitchell. That man's story was a yarn. But what in the name of goodness is the game?"

He sat on in the hotel reading-room buried in thought. And gradually little things, noted subconsciously at the time and forgotten, returned to his memory and became definite mental pictures. Though he had hardly realised it during the interview, Snaith had puzzled him—not Snaith's story, but Snaith himself, his personality. His language, his bearing, all, Mr. Lumley now saw, had been inconsistent. At one time he had been ultra-American; he had, for example, talked the American of the dime novel or the screen message, while at another his English had been as good as Mr. Lumley's own. The more the commission agent thought over it the more suspicious he became that Snaith was concealing his identity—that he was not, in fact, an American at all.

As he turned the matter over in his mind a possible solution suddenly struck him. Could it be that Snaith meditated an attempt to steal the original from the Louvre? He had certainly spoken of a visit to Paris. Could his plan be to destroy Lord Arthur's picture, and to swear that the treasure he had stolen had been purchased from his lordship? If so, he would be able to support his story by incontrovertible evidence of the sale. Yes, Mr. Lumley concluded, this theory certainly represented a possibility.

And if so, there was the equal possibility that he,

Lumley, was assisting in a crime. How could he test the matter? How satisfy himself?

He decided to go down to Scotland Yard, tell his story, and do what he was there advised. Responsibility for the sequel would then be off his shoulders.

He glanced at his watch. It was just ten o'clock. Leaving the hotel, he drove along the Embankment to the Yard.

"I want to see the Inspector on duty," he demanded.

He was shown into a small office, and there a tall, quiet-mannered, efficient-looking man asked him his business.

"I have had, Mr. Inspector, a somewhat unusual experience," began Mr. Lumley. "I don't in the least know that anything is wrong, but the circumstances are suspicious, and I felt I ought to let your people know, so that you could form your own opinion."

"Very right, sir. Perhaps you will tell me the facts."

Mr. Lumley began to recount his adventures. The Inspector listened courteously but impassively till Lord Arthur's name was mentioned. Then a sudden gleam of interest came into his eyes, and he gave his visitor his undivided attention. But he did not interrupt, allowing Mr. Lumley to finish the story in his own way.

"You have made a very clear statement, sir," he said when the other ceased speaking, "and I should like to congratulate you on your wisdom in reporting to us. I think it probable that you'll find yourself justified. Excuse me a moment."

He left the room, returning in a few minutes with another official, who carried a large file of papers.

"This is Inspector Niblock," he said, "and though I couldn't tell until I had heard it, I fancy he will be even more interested in your statement than I was. Would it be too much to ask you to repeat it to him?"

For the second time Mr. Lumley related his experiences. While the first Inspector had shown interest in the story, Niblock scarcely covered up actual excitement with the cloak of professional calm. He repeated his colleague's

congratulations and then turned to the file of papers. From it he drew a number of photographs and handed them to Lumley.

"Have a look over those, sir, will you?" he invited.

Mr. Lumley took the cards. They were portraits of a number of quite ordinary-looking men and women. Mildly surprised, he turned them over. And then his surprise became astonishment, for there, on the fourth card, was a full length view of Mr. Silas S. Snaith.

"Seen him before?" asked Niblock, chuckling and rubbing his hands. "I think you've done a better stroke of business than you know, Mr. Lumley." He became serious in a moment and continued: "And now let us lay our plans, for there must be no bungling in this affair."

The two Inspectors spoke in undertones for a few moments. Then Niblock turned.

"You say the picture is now in your safe, Mr. Lumley? I presume it is in precisely the same state as when you took it down from Lord Arthur's study wall?"

"Precisely."

"We must get hold of it at once. Will you come to your office now and let us have it? You can keep the taxi and drive on home."

The three men left the great building and, hailing a vehicle, were driven to Mr. Lumley's place of business. The latter led his companions to his private room, where, after pulling down the blinds, he produced the dispatch-case. In a moment the detectives were examining the picture.

"We'll borrow it as well as this case," said Niblock as he carefully repacked it. "You may expect us back with it at about five to-morrow. Where does that door lead to?"

"A filing-room."

"The very thing. You can, perhaps, let us withdraw into that room, so that if your interview with Snaith does not go satisfactorily we shall be able to give you assistance. That's all to-night, I think."

Mr. Lumley begged for further information, but Niblock refused it on the ground that the agent's display of

ignorance would be more convincing to Snaith if it were genuine.

"If," the Inspector added, "by some chance he should come before his time, you will tell him that the picture has been left at your bank for safe keeping, but that it will be in your hands before six. If we find him here on our arrival we shall assume the rôle of bank officials. But in that case we shall have to wait in the passage outside your office."

Next evening Mr. Lumley was once more seated in his private room, when, shortly after five, the two Inspectors entered, accompanied by a sergeant in uniform.

"There is the picture," said Niblock after brief greetings had been exchanged, "untouched, except that we have had to put it in a new frame. By an unfortunate accident I dropped it, with the result that the corner of the frame was split and the gilding damaged. You will see here what has happened."

The Inspector undid a brown paper parcel and brought to light the old frame, split, as he had said, at one corner.

"Should Mr. Snaith observe that the frame has been changed," he continued, "you will describe the accident, though saying it happened with yourself. You will express regret for your carelessness, and you will say that you kept the old frame for his inspection. You can leave the rest to us. Now let us into your filing-room, for you must be alone when your visitor comes."

The three police officers stepped into the small back chamber, and the door was almost, but not completely, closed. Mr. Lumley, nervous and considerably perturbed, sat writing at his desk. He did not know what form the coming interview was to take, and he was considerably annoyed that the officers had not taken him more fully into their confidence. He felt that if he only knew what to expect he would be in a better position to meet it.

The minutes passed slowly—so slowly that more than once Mr. Lumley put his watch to his ear to make sure that it was still ticking. But at last six o'clock came, and a few minutes later Mr. Snaith was announced.

"Say, but your railroads want hustling some," was his greeting as he stepped breezily into the room. "I've just got in from Paris, only forty minutes late." He sat down and opened his heavy coat, then went on with more than a trace of anxiety in his tone: "And how has the deal gone? Got it through?"

"Got it through, Mr. Snaith, I am glad to say, and with very little trouble. But one thing is rather upsetting. Lord Arthur says the picture isn't genuine—it's only a copy."

Snaith looked up sharply.

"But you have it all right—here?" he asked, and, in spite of an obvious effort, there was eagerness in his voice.

"Yes; it's in my safe. But when he said it was a copy, I was doubtful——"

"That's all right. I just thought he mightn't know. Don't worry yourself any. All you've to do is to give me the picture and get your money, and the deal's O.K. What did you pay him?"

"Two thousand, but he said he would refund it if you found the picture was a copy and returned it within a month."

"Did he so? Well now, that was vurry considerate of him. Let's have the thing, anyhow."

Mr. Lumley rose and, unlocking the safe, took from it the dispatch-case and laid it on the desk before his visitor. With an eagerness that he could no longer control, Snaith withdrew the picture and, his hands trembling with excitement, tore off the tissue covering. For a moment he gazed at the picture with a gloating satisfaction; then his face changed.

"This is not it," he cried sharply, and his eyes searched Mr. Lumley's face with a look in which suspicion turned rapidly to menace. "By the Lord, if you try to pull any stuff on me, I'll make you wish you had never been born! What's the meaning of it?"

Mr. Lumley, fortified by the knowledge of the presence of his other visitors, took a more lofty tone than he otherwise might have essayed.

"Really, Mr. Snaith," he answered in cold tones, "you forget yourself. I am not accustomed to be spoken to in that way. When you apologise I'll continue the conversation, not before."

For a moment it seemed as if Snaith would resort to violence. Then an idea seemed to strike him, and he controlled himself with an obvious effort and spoke again.

"No offence—no offence," he growled irritably. "You're so plaguey set on your dignity. But explain. That's not Lord Arthur's picture."

"That *is* Lord Arthur's picture," Mr. Lumley asserted stoutly.

"Then you've been monkeying with it. It's not the frame."

"It's not the frame, I know, and if you had been more civil I should express greater regret. As a matter of fact, I dropped the picture—most carelessly, I admit—but it slipped——"

Snaith's gaze had fixed itself on Mr. Lumley with a dreadful intensity. At last, unable to control himself any longer, he burst out:

"Darn it all, man, get to the point, can't you! Where is the frame now?"

"It's here. As I was saying, I dropped the picture and damaged the corner of the frame. I got it reframed, but the old frame was sent back also."

Mr. Snaith sat back limply and wiped his forehead.

"Why the blazes couldn't you say so at once?" he growled. "I'll have the old frame, too."

Mr. Lumley turned back to his safe.

"There," he said, quite rudely for him, "I hope you're satisfied that's the right one."

Snaith took the frame and examined it minutely. Then he turned it over and looked at the back. For a moment he remained motionless, then he hurled it on to the desk and sprang to his feet with an inarticulate snarl, his face livid with rage and disappointment.

"You thief!" he yelled with a bitter oath. "You—thief! If you don't shell out within ten seconds I'll send you

straight to hell!" and the appalled Mr. Lumley found himself gazing directly into the bore of a small, evil-looking automatic pistol.

But at that moment there was an interruption. A quiet voice broke in conversationally:

"Now, none of that, Mr. William Jenkins—none of that. It's on to you this time, I guess. Put it down and give in like a man when you're beaten."

Snaith, thunderstruck, turned to see the two Inspectors covering him with their revolvers. His jaw dropped. For a moment it seemed as if he were going to show fight; then, slowly, his fingers relaxed and the pistol fell on the desk.

"The darbies, Hughes," went on Niblock, "and then we can put away our toys and have a chat."

Snaith seemed utterly dumbfounded, and he made no resistance as the sergeant first pocketed the pistol and then handcuffed him.

When he was rendered harmless, Niblock turned to Mr. Lumley.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said courteously, "for having had to submit you to this, but we had to let him demonstrate before witnesses that he was after the frame, and not the picture. Thanks to you, sir, he has done that pretty completely." He turned to the prisoner. "I have to warn you, Jenkins, that whatever you say may be used in evidence against you, but at the same time, if you wish to make a statement, I will take it."

The prisoner, apparently stupefied at the sudden turning of the tables, made no reply.

"In that case," Niblock resumed, "we had better get away. With your permission, we'll take the picture and frame, Mr. Lumley, and later I'll call and explain anything that may still be puzzling you."

Two days later Mr. Lumley called at the Yard in response to an invitation from Inspector Niblock. There he met the two Inspectors and their Chief, as well as Lord Arthur Wentworth. As Mr. Lumley entered the

room, the latter sprang to his feet and came forward with outstretched hand.

"And this is the man to whom I owe so much," he cried warmly. "Allow me, my dear sir, to express my great gratitude and appreciation of your actions."

His lordship beamed as he pumped Mr. Lumley's hand up and down.

"But," said Mr. Lumley in some embarrassment, "I can assure you, Lord Arthur, that I am still in ignorance of what I have done."

"You will soon know all about it. Tell him, Inspector. You are better up in the details than I."

"Mr. Lumley, sir," began Niblock, leaning forward and tapping the desk with his forefinger, "your friend, Mr. Dobbs, valued that picture at about £40, and Snaith or Jenkins at £2,000—to you at least." The Inspector's voice became very impressive. "They were both wrong. The actual value of that picture was something over five-and-forty thousand pounds."

Mr. Lumley gasped.

"And would you like to see what gave it its value?" went on Niblock, evidently relishing mightily the sensation he was creating. He opened a drawer in his desk, took out a little box, and out of it poured on to the table what seemed a stream of silvery light.

"Pearls! A necklace!" ejaculated Mr. Lumley.

"A necklace, yes," went on Niblock. "More than that. *The* necklace. Lady Wentworth's celebrated pearl necklace, valued at £45,000, which was stolen from her over six months ago."

"I remember," cried Mr. Lumley helplessly. "I read of it at the time. But how——?" he looked his question.

"I'll tell you, sir. Some nine or ten months ago Lord Arthur took on a footman, a young man named William Jenkins. He proved himself a capable servant, and seemed eminently respectable and trustworthy. But he was your Silas S. Snaith.

"Some three months after he arrived there was a big dance at Wentworth Hall, at which her ladyship intended

to wear her necklace. Lord Arthur took it from his safe and handed it to her about 7 p.m. She did not wear it at dinner, which was a comparatively hurried affair, but left it in a drawer of her dressing-table. When she went up about 8.30 to dress for the ball it was gone.

"The alarm was immediately given, and a private detective, who was in attendance, took charge. Police were telephoned for and a ring was made round the house, and no one was allowed to leave unless vouched for. The guests were by this time arriving, but the matter was hushed up and the dance went on.

"In the searching inquiry that followed suspicion at first fell on Jenkins, as being the newcomer. It was further shown that he was out of observation for five minutes between 7 and 8 p.m., in which time he could have visited Lady Wentworth's room. But it was also shown that he could not possibly have left the house nor communicated with an accomplice outside. Therefore, as none of the pearls had come into the market, we came to the conclusion that the thief had hidden them in some place about the house. But the most careful search failed to reveal them.

"You may understand then, sir," Inspector Niblock continued, bowing to Mr. Lumley, "that when I heard that a man of the description of Jenkins was offering a huge sum of money for a valueless picture from the study of Wentworth Hall, I became interested, and when you selected Jenkins from the Hall servants I became more interested still. My colleague and I got the picture from you, and we found that a groove had been cut right round the back of the frame and filled with putty, in which was embedded the necklace. We removed the pearls and fixed up that test with the frame, to make sure it was that he was after. I may say that Jenkins has confessed.

"It appears he is an old friend of Lucille, her ladyship's maid, and she had often spoken in his hearing about the necklace. He had determined to have a try for it, believing he could sell the pearls singly and in different places. He made friends with the butler, got his support,

and so his job. He had decided he could never get directly away with the swag, so he looked round for a hiding place, eventually choosing the frame of this picture. The hiding-place was prepared for weeks beforehand.

"On the evening of the dance Lucille told him the necklace was to be worn. He pumped her as to its resting-place, and while everyone was at dinner, he slipped up to her ladyship's room, snatched up the necklace, ran to the study, and hid it in the prepared hiding-place.

"He lay low while the search continued, but three months later gave in his notice and left. He had then to find some way of getting the picture. He could not go to the Hall himself as he would be known, and I think it really is not easy to devise a better plan than that he adopted."

It remains only to be told that Mr. Lumley shortly became the happy recipient of those same notes for £2,000 which he had handed to Lord Arthur, together with a cheque for the promised reward of £1,000, his lordship holding that of all concerned the commission agent had the best right to the money.

FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

THE HOUSE OF MANY MANSIONS

"NEXT to the squealer," said Parr, the man hunter, making thoughtful repairs on a stogy, "the little tin god of coincidence gets all my joss. The average crook spends about two-thirds of his life in jail simply because, though he might beat the cops, the long arm of coincidence is longer than the long arm of the law. If it wasn't for chance," said the police deputy, his eye roving over the street crowds—and doubtless some mechanism in the back of his head clicking now and then as he identified some familiar face—"if it wasn't for chance, Oliver, I'd be a tailor—or maybe a shoemaker—like that fellow in the window."

He took off his hat and mopped his brow. It was one of those days of late winter when, though the city pavements are swept bare of every flake of snow that falls, there hangs in the air the smell of thaw from distant stream and wood. They paused for cross-tide traffic and there came alongside of them a shabby little fellow in two or three pairs of pants and a coat or two too many, who hugged himself, in addition, to keep warm. Parr regarded him as a strange bug.

"Yes," he went on, "one of those shoemakers in that window." He laughed. "Recent remedial legislation designed to put crooks in jail and keep them there," he said, "has thinned out the good shooting in my district, I admit. Still, with squealers and coincidence, I manage to bag a good trophy or two now and then." His eyes followed the little fellow, who, as rich in choice as any tramp with all time for his own, drifted over to the window where sat three shoemakers half-soling shoes for the edifi-

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cation of passers-by. Quite a little crowd stood watching, because city people are simple and easily amused.

Oliver Armiston chuckled to himself. Pelts! That shabby little fellow was Parr's man Friday, Pelts. The man hunter had undoubtedly recognized a "mug" out of his mental rogues' gallery in that shoemaker's window and had sent Pelts back to look it over. The deputy commissioner never walked abroad without this fellow Pelts trailing behind to keep watch of the wake, and his side partner. Morel, the handsome man, moving ahead as a scout. Pelts was undoubtedly a tramp at heart, whereas Morel looked like a society man—a profession requiring, as a starter, good looks, fine clothes, and a big income. No one would take either for a police detective.

"Coincidence is *verboten* in your business, isn't it?" said Parr, turning to his companion, the extinct author, as they moved forward again and swept into the Avenue. "Why?" he asked. "Is it because it is so true to life? Or because it isn't? Which?"

"It is the lazy man's way," explained Armiston.

"It keeps my jails full," said Parr complacently.

"It's not dramatic," said Oliver.

"Oh, isn't it? Listen! There was a famous porch climber who eluded us for three years—and all the time he was busy climbing porches. How did we get him finally? We didn't. He got himself. He accidentally stepped on the grass in the Park! That's a misdemeanor, punishable by a fine or ten days in jail if it is flagrant. A sparrow cop picked him up and brought him in." Parr chuckled. "Clever, eh?"

"Clever of your desk lieutenant to recognize him when he was brought in," agreed Armiston.

"No; clever of the coincidence!" cried Parr. He produced his cane, which had been standing on its head in a very deep pocket of his ulster, and marched with it alongside. "Here is another! A crank writes a threatening letter to the President when he was in town last. Threatens to kill him. We trace the letter to the district it was mailed from. He probably votes. Such a man is apt to regard the

franchise as a solemn duty. We examine the polling lists in that district. We find he has given his pedigree and signed his name in the same handwriting as the letter. Careless of him to mail that letter in the same district where he voted."

Parr's eyes moved this way and that, never still. He saw strange things in crowds, unseen by other eyes. Crooks knew him to the last hair. They studied him as rats study a cat they would like to hang a bell on. It was a legend that a ripple of fear accompanied Parr wherever he went.

"Here's another!" Parr was harping on the same string for the edification of his author friend. "Did you read of the holdup last night?"

Oliver nodded. It was one of those atrocious crimes that leave the city aghast. Pay-roll bandits had backed a messenger into a hallway and shot him dead without a word. They escaped in a stolen car held in waiting. Around the corner they changed to a second car, also stolen. Half a mile farther on they changed to still a third car, which they picked up in passing. Thus the police had no description of the third car for another hour, when the owner reported his loss.

"A cunning get-away!" said Oliver.

"Except for one thing," agreed Parr. "The second car was cold. It didn't start very well and they were in a hurry. One of them got out and pushed. He left his finger-prints for us. We happen to have copies of them downtown." Parr turned his cold eye on Armiston. "It is stylish among your type of philosophers," he expounded, "to say that nothing really ever happens, that things always occur. Isn't that a fact?"

"It is a fact that there is no effect without cause," agreed the bookish Armiston. "If that is what you mean."

"That is exactly what I mean," said Parr grimly. "Tell me, Mr. Philosopher, what induced this particular crook to get out and leave his mark on that car for me. It might just as well have been one of the others."

"Have you got him?"

"I will have him shortly," said the man hunter easily. His eyes beamed. "I expect to be decorated by the French Government when I turn him in."

"Oh! Who is he?"

"Aristide Leblanc." Parr's tone was just above his breath.

Inwardly Armiston recoiled as if at a shot. But outwardly he preserved his poker face. In fact, he managed a humorous twinkle to the smile and bow he gave some friends passing in a car. To walk and talk with Parr one must be imperturbable; there was no telling how many eyes stared at them from ambush.

Aristide Leblanc was an apache who had cunningly obtained employment in a wealthy household as a butler —the family of Worthington Horn, a banker. He locked the family in the wine vault and abandoned them to die miserably beyond the reach of help, while he looted the house and walked off. Horn had dug his way to freedom literally by his finger nails, and just in time, too, for his wife had been at the point of succumbing. So terrible had been the ordeal that the banker pledged his life and his fortune to the running down of the apache and bringing him to justice. At present Horn was in Paris conferring with the French police.

"He was in hiding here, then?" exclaimed Armiston, shading the incredulity in his voice. Where could such a marked man conceal himself! Never had there been such a price on a man's head, such a hue and cry.

"He's never been away," replied Parr.

"I'd have gambled he was following Horn," said Oliver. "Just one step behind, in the shadow of the pursuit. That would have been the safest place for him." Then he added with conviction, "That fellow has finesse as well as cunning. You'll never get him!"

"He's left his card," said Parr, smiling.

"He makes no effort to cover his tracks! He seems rather proud of them, in fact," put in Oliver.

"I'll have him shortly," reiterated Parr confidently. "The percentage in favor of the bank is beginning to

work against him. He can't beat coincidence. It's Fate! There comes a time when these things work out very simply, in spite of you fiction writers. Hello! What a magnificent fellow we have here!"

The exclamation was evoked by the sight of a door opener, in the regalia of a Dahomey potentate, handing into her landau a woman in gorgeous furs—a woman of the type known among dressmakers as a "larger" woman, as distinguished from a stylish stout. There is something particularly menial about opening doors, it seems; and people who can afford the indulgence have it done with as much pomp and circumstance as possible. This truly magnificent fellow was as tall as a Swiss Guard, and he wore a clanking cloak plastered with medals. He bowed and bowed to the lady, and when he shut her in with a final polish of the door handle he continued to bow and back away as if etiquette prescribed it.

"What a crib to crack!" muttered Oliver Armiston, looking up at the embellished façade and identifying it as that most opulent of recent apartment hotels, derisively known as the Golden Shekel. "Did you ever have a squeal from there, Parr?" he asked.

Parr shook his head. No. He stopped at the next corner, looking down the Avenue and tapping the curb with the point of his stick. A taxi that might have been stalking him immediately drew up and proffered itself. Parr was in the act of stepping in, when a blond young man of the type the English call a nob came to a halt in front of the mail box and began frantically searching himself. It was evident that the dumb letter box had just reminded him that he was to mail a letter, but he had forgotten the letter. Parr looked him over with a smile of pride.

"That door-knob polisher," he was saying to Armiston, and he stepped into the taxi—"that door-knob polisher—" and the taxi rolled forward. The young man was still canvassing his pockets for that letter. It was Morel, Parr's society specialist, called in for orders.

Oliver, for his part, would have liked to continue on foot because of all the rabbits Parr could kick up along

the road. But the deputy evidently had something else on his mind. They ran into a traffic semaphore set against them, but they swung into the center of the Avenue with an angry honk and their car was put through, to an accompaniment of peremptory police whistles, as if it were the King of the Belgians in town on another visit of thanks. They had gone five blocks before the stalled traffic resumed. If Parr had been followed—as he usually was—this regal procedure snuffed out the lurking shadows. Half an hour later they arrived on foot at Oliver Armiston's home in a quiet side street in the lower Fifties.

Since the deputy had taken to calling on his friend Armiston, the extinct fiction writer, for an occasional *tour de force* of the imagination to help out in refractory cases, Parr had been coming here more and more, usually by some such devious route as he had just pursued. During the run of what was known as the insurance-window case—in which one crook had obligingly snuffed out another for him—Parr had installed a private wire here in Armiston's study, and he had conveniently neglected to remove it. It connected directly with Central Office. Many of his most famous cases had been brought to a successful conclusion in the seclusion of this quiet side street.

The deputy had hardly arranged himself in his favorite elbow chair before the fire when his telephone muttered discreetly. It was Morel reporting.

"What's that? You say you never saw him before!" cried Parr with the utmost ferocity.

Morel expatiated; as an added precaution he had turned the well-thumbed leaves of the rogues' gallery, pages that swung on hinges, like museum specimens. But the deputy was not to be mollified.

"Go back!" he ordered. "Wait! Better get yourself invited to dinner. Can you?"

"I think I can arrange it, sir," said Morel meekly.

"Good! Find out what a crook is doing there as lookout. And don't tell me he isn't a crook!" He hung up.

"The carriage starter?" asked Oliver. "Did you recognize him as a crook?"

"No! He recognized me! Didn't you see how careful he was to keep his back turned to me?" cried Parr.

There must have been an unholy glamour about the person of the deputy for crooks, big and little. In their dread they were always fearful he would recognize them. And in their childish vanity they were almost afraid he wouldn't. So they were forever revealing themselves, torn between vainglory and terror. This fellow gave himself away. The hours passed.

Shortly after eight o'clock that evening the figure of a lithesome young dancing man such as any hostess might have been proud of emerged from the Golden Shekel and decided to walk a little, for the air. It was Morel. He must have passed some secret office, for hardly was he out of the block when a magic invisible curtain of espionage fell, without a rustle, about the house of many mansions. In another ten minutes so closely was the Golden Shekel invested by the police that not a shadow could have emerged unobserved. Comings and goings continued apparently as usual, but with each departure a shadow detached itself, unseen.

The telephone muttered again discreetly. Parr listened, his eyes glowed like dull coals.

"Good!" he cried, and hung up. He turned on Oliver. It is more of an art to hold a poker face on good news that bad. This was triumph.

"It's a den of thieves," he said. "The place is crawling with crooks from cellar to garret."

"I thought they were all post-deflation millionaires of the most noisome type!" cried Oliver, aghast, getting the feel of the excitement.

Parr guffawed.

"Oh, not the tenants!" he roared. "The help! Waiters, hallboys, maids, chefs, clerks—they are all crooks! And apparently on their good behavior. A kind of sanctuary!" Parr's face wore the smile of a benign cannibal. Then he added in his *voix blanche*, "Your friend Aristide Leblanc is the maitre d'hôtel."

Tossing this hand grenade into Oliver's lap, he sat back smiling and bowing.

Even the clocks for the moment seemed to forget their occasions and cease to tick; then they all began again, thudding in Oliver's eardrums. Parr, with the light touch of a watchmaker, deftly broke off the ash of his stogy. It wasn't often things fell out so nicely. He eyed Oliver.

"Rot!" snorted Armiston. He glared at Parr.

"Wait," counseled the deputy. He breathed triumph. Morel should be here any moment.

"He is hiding there—Leblanc?" cried Oliver, unwilling to believe.

"Could you think of a better place to hide?" beamed the deputy.

Oliver pulled up sharp. "By George, you're right!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Nobody ever goes there! They are social pariahs! Parr, that apache has more than low cunning! He has brains! If it hadn't been for that look-out——"

"Haven't I been telling you?" interposed Parr. "A crook can't beat coincidence! Its arm is too long."

It was almost laughable that the vanity, the craving of that petty crook on the door should reveal the *abri* of the crafty Leblanc.

"Is he disguised?" demanded Armiston, breathless now.

"I suppose you would say so, yes," said Parr complacently. "But not for Morel. Morel spent two years in Bertillon work. You couldn't fool an anthropologist with a faked Piltdown skull, could you? No. Well, no more could you fool Morel with a faked Leblanc. Here he is!"

The housekeeper, all smiles, was ushering in a faultless young man, done over for evening. Oliver, who knew Morel well, was amazed when he got out of his coat. He looked so much like someone else, anyone but himself. Even if the matutinal Morel had been known among crooks—and Parr was very careful that he should not be—it would have taken an anthropologist now to pierce the disguise which he seemed to have put on by the mere act

of dressing for dinner. Some women do the same thing merely by going to their hairdresser's.

"You managed your get-away all right?" asked Parr, eying Morel narrowly.

"I think so, sir, yes," answered the young dandy. There was a slight tremor in his voice, as if for the first time he let down. The bare question may momentarily have shaken him. If Armiston had doubted before, he was without doubt now. He knew these two and he detected the swift interchange between them. Inured by the many dangers they had faced together, they used unconsciously a pantomime that was beyond words in moments like this. This was touch and go!

"Is everything tight?" muttered Parr.

Morel nodded.

"I left Burke in charge, sir."

"And Pelts?"

Morel shook his head. He didn't know.

Armiston had a momentary vision of the last he had seen of Pelts—the forlorn little fellow pressing his nose against the show window while he watched, with glazed look, that shoemaker. If Pelts had one fault it was that he was hard to call off, once he had the scent.

Morel explained the disposition of the men. Various effects, geographical and other, contributed to perfection in this investiture. In the first place, the Golden Shekel, rearing fifteen stories into the air, stood on a corner opposite the Park, behind whose wall a whole regiment could be planted. At a signal from Parr as their Roderick Dhu, those drear winter thickets would suddenly become alive with bonnet and spear and bended bows. Only a stone's throw away stood the old arsenal, a windy old police barracks, where reserves were held in readiness for any emergency.

"Now, let's see. Who are our neighbors?"

"On the street side," said the complete Morel, who seemed to have chinked every crevice before coming in, "is a private dwelling occupied, it so happens, by your colleague, Deputy Konheim of the Automobile Bureau.

I put two men in his cellar. I thought they might crave a back burrow under the walls."

Parr roared with delight.

"The little tin god of coincidence!" he cried. "As you say, it is the lazy man's method, Oliver! See, I sit here and let it work for me. . . . Go on, Morel."

"On the other side," said Morel, "is new construction —the new Towers the McClintick people are erecting. It's up to the twentieth floor."

"Yes. Nothing but a steel skeleton yet. We might put in our own gang as watchmen."

"I made the arrangement, sir," responded Morel.

"Remember, there are eyes looking out as well as in," cautioned Armiston. It fired his imagination, the way this curtain was drawn.

"Now tell us what you had for dinner," said Parr between his teeth. Now they came to the crux of it.

II

Every little while certain rich people decide that nothing available through the regular channels costs quite enough. The weight of ready money is appalling. Their constant craving is for something more expensive, to distinguish their taste from that of the lower strata. When they reach the peak of extravagance still unappeased, in very desperation they paint the lily for themselves. Sometimes it is a motor car, especially designed from sump pump to door tassels, of which a limited edition of signed copies is privately issued—much as a forbidden book is circulated. These hand-tooled vehicles seldom run, but at least the curse of cheapness has been circumvented.

The Golden Shekel was an expression of this yearning for the reek of wealth in housing. Impossible as it may seem, every apartment had a private entrance and a private automatic lift. It was really a house of many mansions piled one on the other.

The subscribers shared the same servants, breathed the

same air and used the same street; also they had a common *salle à manger,* where, dressed for one another, they dined in the evening. It was said the food was gold plated. Otherwise each lived in his own automatic niche.

Morel bathed and changed, and dug up an acquaintance to take him in. One had to be taken in, it was that exclusive. In lugubrious state, amid the overstuffed splendors of the banquet hall of the Golden Shekel, Parr's handsome man readily passed inspection. He had a way of looking the perfect sap instead of the sophisticate, quite a trick of countenance when you may be under an observation as shrewd as your own. It was a mask ordinarily as impenetrable as the one of black silk Morel wore mornings downtown when he reviewed, with his Bertillon eye, the crooks brought in for the line-up.

So far, so good! Morel turned in response to a murmured question in his ear involving a technic of gastronomy and found himself staring, nose to nose with Aristide Leblanc—whom Morel, too, believed to be just one step behind the suddenly implacable Worthington Horn in Paris. It was an emergency there is no school for. One must be endowed with an iron nerve and a coördination of all the faculties that bespeaks the perfect subconscious state.

"A pheasant's egg—a little high, gentleman, crushed in the sauce," the maitre was suggesting, with that flattering assumption of equality some of these distinguished gentlemen can sometimes confer.

In that moment Morel, the perfect collector, found himself examining, with the utmost fascination, the point of Aristide's jaw, which in this specimen, as rarely occurs, suggested a pair of mandibles united by a central suture for a chin, instead of the single inframaxillary. Also he noted methodically the alveolar and auricular points, and the asterion and the angle of the condyles—trick signposts in the voodoo of craniometry. To the eye of the expert the face had been insidiously lifted: A plucked eyebrow replaced the distinctive lowering effect of the erstwhile child of Nature; a slight tightening of the lower

eyelids gave the face a wholly new regard. There is a beauty doctor who does this thing for the trade. Morel canvassed these improvements with artistic valuation.

"Crushed through a fork and whipped into the oil!" urged Aristide seductively; he lowered his voice: "It is for the *gourmet* only, gentleman!" he said. His baleful gaze, in turn, from force of habit, took Morel's cranial points to pieces, but with less-informed analysis.

Morel shook his head. If it must be egg in the sauce, then a near-by henery white. He could order a dinner to allay suspicion in any quarter; nevertheless, he drew the line on high flavors.

Morel sat tight from soup to nuts, his amazement growing. Just as Lloyd's, of London, list missing ships year after year, so the police post among themselves the names of big crooks who sink without a trace in the ooze of crime. This attrition is continuous, because crime breeds its own virus and takes a bigger toll of its votaries than do the forces of retributive justice. Else, Parr would need more than squealers and coincidence to keep up with the parade. There is no port of missing ships. But here, under the ornate roof of this blatant house of many mansions, was such a cache of jail-birds as might win the chevrons of a whole police force. In fact, Morel at the first blush of this embarrassment of riches could hardly restrain his impulse to dash out and call the wagon.

The apache himself was a day's work for anyone. The man on the door, whose vanity had inadvertently touched off this bonanza, was a mere jackal following on the heels of the lions who lolled inside. The first familiar face Morel had encountered was that of Manny Sheftels, deep-sea card sharp, who had conveniently disappeared over the side in a recent winter passage. Some of his victims would not be too happy to find him safe on earth and brought to book, for Manny had a sly talent for making his accusers appear contemptible. Redrawn, it is true, but still unmistakably Manny to a Bertillon eye. He seemed to occupy the position of social prompter here among these innocents. Elegance under this roof being of a variety such as

only a movie director could beget in the sins of his cinema palaces, the dapper Manny fitted admirably as *arbiter elegantiarum.*

With more of a trade flavor, there was Little Joe Mangin, soup expert—safe cracker—recently out of Leavenworth—under the walls, not through the big front gate. He was the checker on the kitchen door, his valued fingers tamping rubber stamps instead of nitroglycerine during the interregnum.

The cigarette girl was Pin-Point Annie, manipulator of a dozen night-club cloak-room holdups. She was noted for her nervous trigger finger. She was out on bail; overdue, in fact. Among the elegant waiters were such mellifluous artists as Tony the Plasterer—with an arm like cordwood—Soft-Shoe Ferry, the Human Fly; Killer Depuis; hovering over a lady from the oil fields, apparently oblivious of her lavish display of ice—platinum-mounted ice—that decorated the horizontal bosom, was Spanish John, the garroter. So the roster ran.

But most astonishing of all was the unveiling of a recent acquisition to Parr's collection of rare prints downtown—in the person of the resident manager. At first sight his face did not quite isolate itself for filing in the well-ordered card index in the back of Morel's head. Then it came to him. It was Vincent Delby, absconding bank cashier from Seattle—one of those rare birds who build up a lifetime of rectitude for one single splurge of crime. Delby had walked out on his board of directors one fine day after shipping the portable assets of his administration ahead of him.

Morel came to a pause at this point in his recital. The great man hunter, who had never drawn such a net as this before, shook his head, smiling with that look of foolish incredulity which denies an overwhelming event.

"Vincent Delby!" he repeated. His lip curled. "The amateur! Do you imagine for a moment he knows where he is? He does not!"

Usually these amateurs, for whom the police had such scorn, did not get very far. Too late they learn that thiev-

ing is a trade that requires an apprenticeship. Crooks shelter one another, the amateur has no place to go. Yet someone somewhere had reached out and touched this bank wrecker on the shoulder and guided him—and his loot, you may be sure!—to this haven of refuge. Now he was using his undoubted talents to promote the splendors of life for the subscribers at the Golden Shekel, in return for the protective coloring they, unsuspecting, gave him. A retouched Vincent Delby, but undoubtedly, if Parr knew the breed, a quaking fugitive suspicious of every football.

There was a long pause, each peopling it with his own thoughts. Morel was consciously smiling, as if laboring under the flattery of great personal achievement. Parr scowled villainously at the fire. Oliver tugged at his single white lock.

"Who's running it?" asked Oliver. "There must be a head."

"I couldn't make out," said Morel. "Delby is the front, of course, but he is only the stuffed shirt. There is someone else."

"Leblanc," said Parr grimly. "He knows the business. It takes a man of superb endowments to get away with it there. And it takes a cold-blooded killer to hold that gang in leash. Think of the tons of stuff under their very noses!"

There was another silence. Through it there came the long-drawn-out wail of agony of a fire siren, like the cry of a panther; it rose on the air, flooded every crevice with clamor. All heads turned as if stirred by some atavistic dread. The eerie cry sank to a whimper, then died away. The staccato exhaust of some great cannonading fire truck smote the resonant air of night with blows like the hammer of Vulcan. Then the horrible siren cry rode the wind again. A great many indignant people have written letters to The Times asking "Why do you make so much noise going to a fire, when the streets are empty?" The answer is for children: "To remind you not to play with matches!" From near and far came the clang of bells,

screams big and little, echoing and reëchoing among the empty streets.

"That's near by," said Oliver.

Parr's telephone rang. Burke speaking.

"The Towers is burning. I thought maybe you'd want to know, sir."

"The Towers? There's nothing to burn—nothing but steel girders."

"It's in some falsework—planks and timbers—that the workmen use. It's two hundred feet up in the air."

"Sew up the block with the reserves!" commanded Parr. "Let no one come in, not even a reporter!"

"But if they have to get out—out of the Golden Shekel! What then? Embers are falling all around it!"

"I expect likely," laughed the deputy. "Well, they can't. I'll be right over."

He hung up. He arose and put on his things, as did the others.

"My little tin god is working overtime for me tonight," he said, laughing. "I didn't want to pull that joint until daylight, so we could see just what we were doing. Now we've got a nice fire next door. We might dig up a little panic in the Golden Shekel and drive out our precious lambs, one by one, into our waiting arms." He usually chose the simple way, avoiding, as much as possible, the sensational exploitation of his acts in the press. "Well, we'll see what it looks like first," he said grimly.

They hurried on, Morel running ahead. When they turned the corner into the Avenue the spectacle in its rare magnificence broke on them as if framed for a picture. High up above the roof tops, like something floating unsupported in the night, the bud of flame gently swayed in a graceful fire dance. It was one of those nights with no moon, and there were no low-lying clouds to reflect the luminescence of the city streets; the fire blazed placidly against the clean background of the night. Now and then a balk of timber—probably a 12 by 12 that the big derricks up there handled like tooth-picks—dislodged itself and fell, a blazing plummet, to the street below.

Or some lighter stuff, with little plumes of flame blowing this way and that, wafted in spirals like a falling leaf. But the spectacle was all up above.

It was the theater hour, when just before midnight, for a brief moment, traffic in the Avenue surges to full tide, to die away as suddenly. This traffic, all northbound, people going home, was jammed against the rigid police lines ahead. The passengers in their gay wraps crowded the sidewalks with cries of amazement and delight.

"Look at that!" cried Parr, halting and pointing in sheer admiration. "Did you ever see a shot like that in the movies? No, you didn't!"

His jubilant cry was occasioned by a new aspect to the picture. Against the dull outline of that skyscraper skeleton, on top of which the pyre burned, there now appeared crawling fireflies. First a single one, then another, several, six and more. They moved slowly, with a stop and go, climbing floor by floor, up and up toward the blazing timber. They were firemen with lanterns and fire extinguishers, mounting by scaling ladders. Climbing with a scaling ladder is the test for a fireman. When he stops doing that he stops being a fireman, goes out to pasture.

The deputy broke into a run; the boy in him got the better of him. Oliver hung to his heels. They pushed aside the crowd, the bulldog visage of Parr winning for them a breach in the police lines that otherwise stood like a rock. Burke was evidently taking no chances until his chief arrived to take charge. Inside the sacred vacuum of the police lines there stood only the highly privileged Golden Shekel, with a newly swarmed clump of police plugging its every exit. There was about it all the sprawl of fire apparatus. Directly below, the spectacle was dwarfed into insignificance. This was only a seven-minute wonder, after all. Parr, with a sigh, saw that he could not turn it to account, that he would have to wait till daylight to back up his wagon. He passed the word to Morel: Not a soul was to be permitted to emerge from the Golden Shekel—those were fire orders! The patrols and hose wagons, and odds and ends that trail along with

such noisy jubilance whenever a fire calls, were winding in their hose lengths, folding tarpaulins, gathering personned and backing off and going back home for another wink and nod. There was no chance to get water up there in the clouds. It was up to the scaling-ladder crew.

Parr wandered over to the hook-and-ladder truck that mothered those intrepid climbers.

"Well, Jerry, my old pal!" he burst out happily. He seized the grizzled old captain, who had a megaphone strapped across his face, and wrung his hand. "Why, Jerry, I thought you were retired and out to grass years ago!" cried the enthusiastic Parr.

Capt. Jeremiah Gilhooley, who had followed the trucks through snow and ice for forty years, started back, stung to the quick by such an insult. The deputy, quick to see his mistake, turned the subject.

"Those are fine lads you've got there!" he cried heartily. The lanterns were still crawling up and up in that interminable climb, painfully slow and small now.

"And why should I retire when I can climb a pole?" cried the outraged Captain Gilhooley, not to be diverted. And to prove it he snatched a scaling ladder off the truck, hooked it onto the cornice above him with a single thrust and started up like a monkey. Gaining the first horizontal girder, he clung there precariously while he drew up his ladder and swung it above his head for another hold. And up he went another notch. He roared through his megaphone to the fireflies above him, "Step lively, ye terriers! I'll be treading on yer tail!"

The first firefly lantern was on the level of the fire now; then the second and the third winked out as it crawled out of sight over the ledge. Those crawling fireflies below continued to ascend, winking themselves out one by one, over the top, the brave captain with the rest. Then, of a sudden, as if from some great ghostly hand clamped over it, that blazing pyre aloft—that must have shone like a beacon for ships at sea—died down and whipped out. The fire was out! That was all there was to it!

After an interval a lantern looked over that high ledge and the descent began. It was even more breath-taking, their climbing down, than going up.

"I'd better fade out of the picture," laughed Parr. "That fellow Jerry will want to fight when he gets back. Never, Oliver, suggest to a cop or a fireman that he is old enough to retire!"

Parr moved into the background. Morel came up.

"All snug?"

Parr, as he asked the question, let his keen eyes explore the outlines of the precious Golden Shekel. The face of Vincent Delby, the bank wrecker out of Seattle, could be seen pressing itself against the barred windows giving on the street. That amateur fugitive was doubtless the prey to the most terrible fears, even now when the excitement had died down and the chances of his being driven into the open seemed remote.

"All snug, sir," reported Morel. "They are like a herd of cattle in a burning barn. We'd have to go in and drag them out if we wanted them!"

It was all over. Hook and Ladder Truck Number Thirty Blank, Captain Jeremiah Gilhooley, was departing, its bell tolling gently its farewell hymn and its siren murmuring *sotto voce* as it gathered speed. It cut a path through the jammed crowd behind the police lines with a sudden threatening snarl of a panther aroused, but in another moment all that came back on the night air was the rhythmic purr of its sweet-running motor. There is nothing so tame as a fire truck going back home.

Now there were police whistles sounding, and sharp commands; then the police lines broke and let the flood through.

"Keep them moving, Burke!" commanded Parr. "No jamming in front of the place, remember! I'll see you at daylight."

Parr and Oliver walked home. It was only a few blocks and there was a zest in the night air for tired brains. Inside, Parr folded his hands over his ample girth and settled back in his favorite elbow chair for a wink and

a nod. This was one of those nights when he would take a hot towel in lieu of a bed. Oliver, for his part, had suddenly become wide awake. The tips of his fingers were itching. A sure sign! He did most of his thinking with the tips of his fingers—an old trick from his days of story writing. He softly opened his desk and brushed the keys of his faithful typewriter, letting those gifted cerebral ganglia in the fingertips waft him hither and yon, on the wings of fancy. As he wrote, there gently nudged his thoughts the low wail of a fire siren. Suddenly he came to a halt and shook Parr violently.

"Parr! Wake up, Parr!"

"Yes—yes——"

"Are you awake, Parr?"

"Yes!" said Parr, in that abused tone of the guilty.

"You'd better telephone your friend Gilhooley——"

"Eh? What's the——"

"See if he's got home yet, Parr!"

Oliver frantically shook the deputy.

"Wake up, Parr! Wake up!"

He seized the telephone and jammed it into Parr's hand.

Parr suddenly was wide-awake; with one sweep he seized the phone. He called for a connection through Central Office. Before he asked his question he knew what the answer would be. The answer would be no. In that swift moment, like a man drowning, the whole panorama floated before his eyes.

Aristide Leblanc, the apache! The apache climbed over from his own roof and set the fire in that pile of plank and timber! Then he and his murderous crew lay in wait for the scaling ladders to come crawling over that parapet one by one. One by one! Oh, it was poetically simple! Aristide Leblanc took care of that crew of firemen, one by one, as they came over the top.

Then Aristide calmly put out the fire with a squirt of the extinguishers, borrowed the firemen's helmets and coats and scaling ladders. And down there in the street Aristide borrowed that hook-and-ladder truck, and with the bell tolling gently the farewell hymn and the siren

muttering *sotto voce,* under the admiring eyes of Mr. Parr and his cohorts Aristide drove away, till even the soft purr of the engine was lost to sound. Where were they now? Where? What difference did it make? Who would think of stopping a rampant fire truck, no matter how much noise it was making, no matter where it was going?

"They don't answer, chief."

"They are not expected to," responded the deputy wearily. "Flash Morel for me!" He rubbed his head, felt of it tenderly to see if it was there. "Morel!" He snarled, he swore horribly. What the shocked Morel, who had been playing pinochle at the arsenal, waiting for dawn, got out of it was that he should go at once to the roof of the Golden Shekel and find there the dead bodies of the crew of Hook and Ladder Truck Number Thirty Blank.

Parr arrived on the scene in person before Morel found them. The hovering Delby, the amateur, who, it seemed, had been left behind, along with some others too old for the climb, followed them, tremulous, hoping against hope. There were so many doors and shafts to guard the magnificent isolation of the subscribers that it was some time before they found the right chute to take them to the roof. The crew of the fire truck had been stored in the penthouse, just big enough for the purpose. They were tied tight, Captain Gilhooley and all his bra' men. Each sported a welt the size of an egg over one eye, the fruit of a soft-nosed bludgeon wielded by the unerring apache. Otherwise they were unmarked and all alive. They had no story to tell. They had simply been extinguished one by one as they came crawling over that parapet. Parr's men were sweeping up the agonized Vincent Delby and the others, and were leaving. When all was said and done Parr turned on Morel with curling lip.

"So you didn't make your get-away all right, after all?" he snarled.

Morel would have taken oath that he had withdrawn without disturbing that picture. Certainly that villainous

apache, in his guise of maitre, had not visibly turned a hair under Morel's scrutiny.

Parr, snatching at straws, asked savagely "Where's Pelts?"

No one had seen him. Pelts, the scent in his nostrils, was probably fatuously chasing that shoemaker that Parr had set him on earlier in this fateful day.

At midnight an abandoned fire truck was reported loitering in Pelham Parkway, Westchester. At two there came a cipher message by wire from New Haven. Parr raced to Curtiss Field by auto.

An intrepid flyer, in his pajamas, said, "We don't take off at night. We can't make a landing. That's elemental!"

"We'll hover till dawn!" commanded Parr, with so much pent-up venom in the words that they took off at once; they arrived over Boston just when the first pink of day showed beyond the Light.

It was shortly after eight in the morning that a long low rakish-looking parlor-car motorbus, of trunk-line vintage and as squat as a long-wheel-base hippopotamus, rumbled softly down the runway and entered the terminal. It had been delayed in leaving New York this night by tire trouble, and most of its passengers had gone over to a rival. But fortunately, passing through City Island, off Pelham Bay, it had picked up a dozen emergency passengers. So the trip had not been a dry haul after all.

Parr and two hundred men, the finest the police force of Boston affords, enveloped the motorbus as it came to a soft stop and carefully extracted therefrom Aristide Leblanc, the apache, and ten companions, together with their luggage, which was very heavy. This luggage contained all the portable loot to be had on short notice from the Golden Shekel.

"I'll take care of this little fellow," said Parr, taking out of the line-up a shabby forlorn creature in two or three pairs of pants and a coat or two too many. Since dropping overboard with that message to Parr at New Haven, Pelts had been curled up in a chair behind the apache. to all intents, asleep.

"Chief," cried the exultant Pelts, "you are a wonder! That shoemaker—remember that shoemaker you sent me back for? He was the outside man for this gang of crooks. Every so often he went up there and looked their place over, to see if it was all right. He was the one that tipped them off and started the fire on the roof. I was pinned to his tail!" said Pelts with the feeble smile of a shy man who nevertheless has his pride.

BERTRAM ATKEY

THE UN-PUNCTUAL PAINTING

I

THE hare, abruptly startled from its quiet retreat under a spreading mangold leaf, was so excessively flustered that for a fraction of a moment it paused, thus unwisely forming, as it were, the apex of a triangle comprising Mr. Smiler Bunn, his partner ex-Lord Fortworth and itself.

Then it gave a mighty bound and started for a spot some miles away. It was late.

Mr. Bunn's gun spoke crisply and the hare ceased from troubling and was at rest.

"Pretty," said Mr. Bunn in accents of justifiable pride. "A very pretty shot—as clean as chloroform. I don't know that I've ever made a better shot. I'll eat his meat *à la Royale!*" he concluded with a certain cannibalistic gusto, and called across to Fortworth:

"How's that, Squire?"

Fortworth looked up from the gun which he was reloading.

"Fine work," he cried, smiling. "I never shot a hare cleaner in my life."

"Hey?" bawled Mr. Bunn. "That was my hare, Squire. Sorry."

Fortworth drew nigh, laughing. They had just finished their day.

"*Your* hare, haha! Don't deceive yourself that way, old man. Your shot kicked up the dust a good yard behind his tail. I saw it. I said to myself at the time, 'That's hard luck—a good shot, too, but short. It's his

(From "Smiler Bunn, Gentleman Adventurer," by Bertram Atkey. Copyright, 1927, by The Dial Press, Inc., New York.)

worst fault. He never will throw far enough in front.' You will find that hare's heart practically pierced in all directions by the shot from *my* gun. Does *that* convey anything to you?"

Mr. Bunn was somewhat purple.

"*You* are the lad that is deceiving himself," he said emphatically. "That hare was dead before your charge was more than halfway," he expostulated firmly. "There's reason in all things, Squire. A child could see that I shot that hare. It ain't like me to take what isn't mine, and as a general rule I give up what is strictly mine for sake of peace and quietness, but this is stretching it a bit too far. I've got, in sheer common fairness, to insist that I shot that hare, Squire. I'm afraid you'll have to hand it to me this time."

But Fortworth merely roared with angry and scornful laughter.

"Hand you nothing!" he shouted. "If that animal could speak *I'm* the lad he'd blame for shooting him—but you'd get the credit for frightening him. Man-alive, d'you think I'd tell a lie for a mere hare? I *felt* myself shoot him. The instant I pressed the trigger I said, 'My hare!' and a good shot it was, though I say it. I heard your gun but I thought it was the echo of mine."

"You make me tired, Squire," declared Mr. Bunn furiously. "Why should I try to claim your hare—I've shot far more than you have to-day, as you know. I'm in form—at the very top of my form——"

"One miserable rabbit is what you were ahead of me—and he was so slow you could have killed him with the butt of your gun," replied Fortworth.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said the keeper, coming up. "But the man that shot that hare is going to get away with it if we don't look out. He was lying in the ditch with a gun—a poacher—most darin' man, gentlemen!"

The partners looked in the direction of the hare and perceived that it had vanished. Dangling over the shoulder of a gipsy-like gentleman, it was moving at an extremely brisk rate towards the thick woods on the right.

"D'you mean to say *he* shot it?" they demanded simultaneously.

"Yes sir. You all three fired together—your shot, sir, blew a mangold to pieces a yard behind him"—(this to Mr. Bunn)—"and your shot, sir, was a foot too high. I was watching, gentlemen."

They faced him, their mouths opened to blast him where he stood—when at that instant another hare, seeming as big as a jackass, bounded in panic out of his form not twenty feet away. As these remarkable animals sometimes will, he had remained there through all the noise—either scared stiff or merely foolish.

Bang—bang! Mr. Bunn fired in mad haste, swearing as he fired. A little spray of débris leaped into the air a good yard behind the hare.

. . *"Bang—bang!"* Fortworth as nearly as possible had pulled both triggers together—but with no other effect than to frighten the fleeing hare into a furious spurt.

"Haha! You both bossed him!" laughed the keeper, completely forgetting himself.

They turned on him like two grizzlies, drawing breath to sack him, but fortunately for him Fate intervened to save him—Fate in the form of Sing Song, Mr. Bunn's automatic crutch. The Chink was cantering lightly over the mangolds, a telegram in his hand.

Delighted at the opportunity of a more or less graceful "get out" of a slightly undignified position the partners feigned intense interest in his approach.

"What has the yellow gink got hold of now?" growled Smiler.

"Looks like a wire," suggested Fortworth, retailing the obvious.

Sing Song placed the telegram in his master's hand and Mr. Bunn gave his gun to the keeper.

"See that it's properly cleaned this time," he said. "It's been shooting foul all day. Lord de Grey himself couldn't hit a flying barn with it—the gun's filthy."

He opened the telegram, glanced at it, and handed it to Fortworth.

"What d'you make of that, Squire?" he demanded.

Fortworth absorbed the contents of the wire, which were brief but to the point:—

Victor kidnapped. No clue. Detectives useless. Implore you both come Dunes Hall.—Katie Beauray.

"That's the drawback to being the only grandson of a multi-millionaire and pet godchild of a childless billionaire —you're apt to be kidnapped," said Mr. Bunn, pulling out his cigar case. "We'd better go, hey? There's no need to be desperate, though I suppose Dunes Hall is in a pretty fluster about it. I should like to have a bet that the kidnapper, whoever he is, is taking rather more care of Victor Beauray than he would of the Kohinoor if he'd had the luck to kidnap that."

He lit his cigar.

Fortworth acquiesced, and together they strolled back to the comfortable farmhouse they had rented with the shooting.

In spite of the naturally rather frantic nature of the telegram they did not unduly strain themselves in the matter of speed. As Mr. Bunn had said, little Victor Beauray, who some day, with luck, would be one of the richest men on earth, might be kidnapped, but he was as safe with his " 'nappers" as he would be at home in his costly little bed. Any man or men with the brains necessary to get away with Victor (as Mr. Bunn put it) had sufficient and more than sufficient sense to take care of him, for he was precious.

And in any case, as Fortworth took occasion to observe, there was nothing to be gained by prancing swiftly among the mangold wurzels in an agitated manner. Far better take it steadily—and stroll quietly back to the excellent dinner which awaited them, thinking it over quietly and carefully.

"We shall gain nothing by rushing this thing—" said Fortworth——

"Or by tackling it on an empty stomach," supplemented

Mr. Bunn. "One thing at a time and only one is quite enough for Mr. Bunn—that's poetry, and true, too."

So they sent the keeper to the Post Office with a telegram of two words: "Surely coming," and proceeded to take the necessary steps to guard themselves against the danger of travelling on empty stomachs—a wise precaution, but a lengthy process.

It was nine o'clock at night before their big limousine, with Sing Song at the wheel, rolled silently out on to the main road for its hundred-mile run.

They discussed their problem between dozes *en route*, but they knew so very little of the circumstances that they did not arrive at any conclusion of importance during the first half of their journey.

But at about eleven o'clock Fortworth woke up with a start so violent that he woke Mr. Bunn.

Smiler glared under the electric light.

"What's the idea?" he demanded resentfully.

"How idea?" mumbled Fortworth.

"Kicking me on the knee-cap that way! There's no need to hack me on the knee-cap to attract my attention."

"I had a dream," explained Fortworth, "and I dreamed I was kicking somebody else. That's it—somebody else." His voice rose. "And I don't mind betting that the man I dreamed I was kicking is the man who has kidnapped Victor Beauray."

Mr. Bunn smiled an ironical smile.

"Well, it's one way of tracking him down—dreaming of him. But it's a pretty poor way, Squire," he said, indulgently—"yes, pretty poor and I guess you've got another dream coming to you. Who was it?"

The dour ex-peer leaned forward.

"Prince Rupert of Rottenberg!" he said.

An expression of amazement flashed on to Mr. Bunn's face, and unconsciously he nodded. He had not thought of the man who had been Katie Beauray's second husband—until divorced.

"Well, that's not such a bad guess—for a dream," he said, handsomely. "I'll own it. Yes. Rupe certainly is a

very likely lad for this business. It's a thousand to one that he's hard up—most of these German was-Royalties must be—and it would be natural for him to think of Ebney Rush's millions when he was planning to make a few more marks for himself. And the thought of Rush would lead him on to the Beaurays and their child. Yes—on the whole, it's likely you've dreamed about right. However, we shall know more later. Meantime," he concluded with rather ponderous humour, "go to sleep and dream again, Squire—dream again. Perhaps you'll dream of the address of the place where Rupert's hiding the lad. And if you dream you're kicking the door in, kick a little more to the right. You want to bear in mind that you're wearing shooting boots, Squire, and that I'm not wearing cricket pads."

And so saying Mr. Bunn lapsed comfortably into his interrupted slumbers.

Fortworth did dream again. He dreamed that he and Mr. Bunn had found little Victor in a field of mangold wurzels, and while they were arguing as to who had seen him first, Prince Rupert of Rottenberg sprang out of a ditch and had seized the boy and vanished into the woods with him while an old jack hare had come up and told them that their guns were foul and their shooting disgraceful, and that Lord de Grey had sent a telegram complaining about it.

This dream Fortworth did *not* mention.

II

It was in the neighbourhood of one o'clock when the two old rascals arrived at Dunes Hall, for so the beautiful old Manor House on the Norfolk coast which the Beaurays were occupying was named, and the first wave of alarm had died down to an extent. The family was there in force—Mr. Ebney Rush, the ferro-concrete substitute monarch, father of Katie Beauray, and grandfather of the missing boy, Mr. Henry le Hay, of Brillingham Castle

(when not in America), the world-famous lard millionaire, and his wife; Major Geoffrey Beauray, D.S.O., M.C., and about four rather hunted-looking detectives, some private, some official—all vainly worrying every nook and cranny for signs of some clue.

The partners were met by practically the whole family in the great hall, and the warmth of their reception would have been rather flattering to any couple less free from self-consciousness.

They entered briskly, and smiling—the only people who had dared to smile in that house for the last forty-eight hours—and subdued greetings were made.

Mr. Bunn looked at Katie Beauray.

"Come here, my dear," he said, and put his great hands one on each shoulder.

"You're worrying," he said, sternly. "Why? Nobody's going to hurt your baby—that's the last thing that can happen. The people who have taken him don't want to hurt him—they're probably taking far more care of him than of their own children, if they've got any. What they want to hurt is his grandfather's and godfather's great big swelled-up bank accounts. Now, if you start worrying I can't think properly—nor my partner either. And if we can't think properly it will take us a good deal longer to get the little lad back. We're going to make you a promise. We're going to get Victor back for you and quickly. I can't tell you to an hour exactly when, but you can be sure you won't have long to wait. Do you believe me?"

Mrs. Beauray looked up at the big face, the massive head, of the old adventurer, and nodded. She actually smiled a little.

"Yes—oh, yes, yes," she said.

"Very well, then. It will probably cost the family a pretty penny, but that'll be all right. Money's no object, thank God!" said Mr. Bunn comfortably. It wasn't his money.

"Take her to bed, Mrs. le Hay—you both ought to be in bed. You're tired out, both of you. I can see it. I'm

surprised at you, Geoff, and you, Henry le Hay, permitting them to wear themselves out when it is essential that they should keep fit—'pon me soul, I'm surprised at men of your ability!"

He was talking to a winner of the D.S.O. and M.C., and to about the third richest man in America—but they looked guilty. Le Hay opened his mouth to explain that American husbands are not expert at sending their wives to bed against the ladies' wishes, but on second thoughts closed it with a metallic click of his gold teeth.

It was noteworthy that the ladies went to bed forthwith, quite meekly. What Mr. Bunn said went in that house. But that he had proved his right to a certain authority neither Katie Beauray nor Mrs. le Hay would have dreamed of denying.

"And now," said he, a few moments later, as he drew a huge and luxurious arm chair up to a blazing fire in the library, "now we can get busy!" He carefully lit a cigar, presumably the first stage of the act of getting busy.

"Now, Geoff, let's have the facts."

Major Beauray (himself largely indebted to the partners for many benefits) gave them full particulars, the two multis sitting silently at the table just behind.

It was quite simple.

Little Victor—five years old—had been put to bed as usual in his room adjoining and communicating on the right with his mother's room, two nights before. In the communicating room to the left slept his nurse, a tried and trusted old retainer, who only needed at any hour of the night to touch an electric bell-push in her bedpost to turn out two hefty "guards" (usually camouflaged footmen) who slept within easy reach.

The only entrances to the boy's room were through the nurse's room or his mother's.

At half-past eleven Katie Beauray and her husband had gone in and seen the boy. Everything was in perfect order and quite normal.

In the morning Victor had gone. The room and bed were wholly undisturbed. The nurse had overslept a little

and it was Mrs. Beauray who had discovered that the boy's bed was empty.

That was the whole of it.

It was as if a silent hand had reached in through the quarter-opened window of the boy's room and plucked him. No sound had been heard, no sign had been seen.

Lard le Hay and Mr. Ebney Rush had communicated with Scotland Yard *and* the Home Office—the country Police Station was not for them—and they were quite "big" enough men to put the wind up to an appreciable degree in certain of the places where the Government do their governing. With a four-and-ninepenny dollar grinding its iron heel on the face of an eight-and-sixpenny pound the Government could not fail to realise that nothing was to be gained by failing in courtesy to two really hefty money-captains of the U.S.A.

So a pair of the very best detectives available were promptly hunted down to Dunes Hall—not to mention a brace of private investigators, of whom Mr. Ebney Rush had heard good words spoken.

They had all worked very hard—the detectives. They had examined everybody in the house and everything, but they had not found any clues.

Victor Beauray had disappeared in the night. They were well aware of that, but it was all of which they were well aware.

One—the senior official detective—had committed himself to the statement that it looked like the work of "professionals," and had telephoned to London certain enquiries as to the whereabouts of one "Uncle" John Burton, a kidnapper. But it proved that "Uncle" John was still working off—at Portland—the penalty of a slight miscalculation in the matter of a little "job" which had missed fire some three years before.

Mr. Bunn, rather audaciously, had the official detectives paraded before him. He questioned them kindly and they rather warmed to him. After all, even senior detectives are human and possess nerves, and when the Lord High Chief Topdog is a little "breezy" he usually contrives to

pass it on to his underlings. As in the Army, when the Colonel of the regiment is ravening for fresh, hot blood in large quantities, you rarely find a really happy sergeant-major, so in the Police.

Mr. Bunn's questioning of the really competent official detectives was characteristic.

"You've been here nearly twenty-four hours," he said. "When did you eat last? Have you had any sleep?"

The answers were "six hours ago" and "no."

Mr. Bunn gazed coldly at Messrs. Beauray, le Hay and Rush—who looked a little shamefaced.

"*All* men work best with dinners under their belts and the grits out of their eyes," he said rather severely.

"Honestly, now, have you found out anything worth while?" he asked in that man-to-man tone of his, which was well calculated to inspire confidence.

The senior detective shook a worried head.

"Nothing. I never heard of such a case—never. That's why we're here now. There must be something waiting to give us a start. I never heard of a case which didn't have one loose end hanging out. I—we've—questioned the servants minutely—turned them inside out. They've noticed nothing—can think of nothing——"

"Except possibly that boot-boy—Cooper, sir," said the junior detective, very diffidently indeed.

"Cooper! What about Cooper?" The whole five of them pounced like hawks.

"Cooper? Who's Cooper?" snapped Ebney Rush. "What does *he* say?"

The detective consulted his note-book.

"He doesn't seem to be quite all there, but I made a note of his fancy, although it probably has no bearing on the matter. He says that he noticed that the Corot—that picture near the hall clock, gentlemen—" here the detective read from his book, " 'was an hour later in the evening the morning after the night the little boy was kidnapped than it was the afternoon before!' I tried to get out of him what he meant but he's as shy as a hare and he turned sulky and said he meant nothing—it was the only

thing he'd noticed. He seemed to me to be half-witted and I gathered that he had got confused with the Daylight Saving Order. The clocks were put back an hour on the night the child disappeared. I've seen him twice but can make nothing out of him."

Mr. Bunn's eyes were half-closed, but Fortworth was staring at him. The ex-peer knew that steel-like gleam through the eye-lids of old.

"Just read again what this lad Cooper said, will you?" requested Mr. Bunn, blandly.

The detective read:—

"The little picture near the clock in the hall was an hour later in the evening the morning after the night the little boy was kidnapped than it was the afternoon before."

"That," said Beauray drily, "is very helpful."

Mr. Bunn turned to him.

"Don't you be too sure that it's no good, Geoff. It's only a detail and a little detail at that—but so's the gap of a sparking plug. And you wouldn't get very far along the road without a gap to your sparking plug points, hey?"

"You think, sir, that it means something?" queried the main detective, politely.

"On the whole, I do, yes—sure," said Mr. Bunn guardedly.

Messrs. Ebney Rush and Lard le Hay—both fine judges of a man, though they were perhaps a notch or two below their average concerning Mr. Bunn—began to get excited.

"Say, Geoff, press that bell and send for Cooper," said Mr. Rush.

But Smiler stayed him with a large, warning hand.

"If," he said, "if you want to scare the little devil into a fit of meaninglessness you couldn't do better than fetch him out of bed and parade him before the seven of us here. No, Rush, old man—let him alone for to-night, and *I* will deal with the lad to-morrow."

He graciously dismissed the detectives.

"What you need, m'friends, is a good square meal and

some sleep. After that, I've got an idea I can keep you busy," he informed them. They went out, grateful but puzzled, and stared very hard at the clock in the hall which had been put back an hour, and at the picture that was "an hour later in the evening the morning after the night," and so forth.

"There's no sense in it, Alfred, that I can see," said the main detective—one Rufton. "*Everything* is an hour late in the evening if you put your clock back an hour—and if you put it back two hours, well, everything's two hours later. He's a decent old bird, that chap Flood" (you remember Mr. Bunn was known as 'Wilton Flood')—"a very sensible, decent old bird, indeed, but when he's seen that little boiled owl Cooper I fancy he'll realise that when we turned Cooper down we turned down nothing."

They wandered on down the corridor to the butler's room.

"Everything's an hour later—from the clock in the hall to the mousetraps in the larder—if you're fool enough to look at it in that light," came the puzzled muttering of the chief sleuth, gradually dying out over his shoulder—"except our supper—and that's a good six hours later."

"Yes, sir," said the junior detective, feelingly. "That's right, sir."

"And *you* were a bit above yourself to mention it at all. Why don't you keep your mouth shut when I'm reporting? Everything in this house is an hour later than it was—except your mouth. And that's a good hour too early."

"Very sorry, sir."

"All right. Cut it out in future."

"Certainly I will, sir. . . ."

They halted at the "butlery."

Meantime things in the library were interesting.

The "multis" and Beauray possessed what was now an ingrained and growing belief in Mr. Bunn, and not unnaturally they were keenly anxious to learn as much as his somewhat mysterious manner led them to believe he knew.

But he was not to be drawn.

He beamed round upon them kindly enough, but he was firm.

"No," he said. "Until I've seen this lad, Cooper, there will be nothing doing. Not because I won't, but because I don't want to raise a lot of false hopes. You don't want to get any idea that I'm churlish about this business. I'm not. It hurts me to hold my idea up—but it's got to be."

He gazed at Ebney Rush.

"There you are, Ebney, just itching to offer me thousands of pounds for getting the little lad back—and you, Henry le Hay, with your finger on the trigger of your cheque book and the cheque book itself aimed dead true at my breeches pocket for the same service—you too, Geoff—ain't that so?"

"That's so," chorused the millionaires crisply.

"Well, I'm sorry. We like money, my partner and me, as well as the next man—but we can't take money for nothing. When we've got young Victor comfortably straddling across his rocking horse flogging the hide off it, then —and not till then—we'll say 'Shoot!' but not before—no, sirs. That's right, Squire, ain't it?"

"Sure," said Fortworth faithfully. "Poor—compared with some of you—we are. But we're proud, hey, Flood?"

"Proud as Lucy Firr—whoever she was," acquiesced Mr. Bunn. "Friend of Charles the Second, wasn't she?"

And with that the party broke up to get the rest they all needed.

III

Boot-boy Cooper was busy upon his lawful occasions. That is to say, upon the following morning he had collected from various dressing rooms such articles as the valets of the gentlemen of the house had put out for his early morning attention, prior to their own efforts later, and was *en route* to the scene of his daily labours. He was not hastening, for he was one of the earliest risers in the house. Boot-boy Cooper, indeed, usually rose much earlier than he need have done—in order to gratify a passion

which is infrequently part of the psychological equipment of boot-lads.

Mr. Cooper's passion was all for art in the form of painted pictures. The son of poor but not actively dishonest parents, Mr. Cooper, at the age of fourteen, was unanimously considered by the entire staff of Dunes Hall to approximate to half-wittedness, and it was due solely to the kindness of the housekeeper's heart that the shy, undersized lad was permitted to earn a few shillings a week at the big house.

He could have improved himself. He had, indeed, been approached by the bailiff of a local agriculturist with offers of higher emolument for duties connected with the cleaning out of stables and cowsheds, but this he had refused on the ground that there would be no oil-paintings to look at in the cow department. He had, in short, sacrificed material advancement for the sake of art. He had informed his mother, with tears, that he would certainly die if he was torn away from his daily passionate, but furtive study of the pictures at Dunes Hall. Whence had sprung his fierce, half-crazy devotion to painting nobody knew. It was thought by his father, a cowman of no great intellect, that Mrs. Cooper's descriptions of the pictures of an artist who had been lodging at her mother's cottage in the village some little time before the lad had made his appearance in this vale of tears, had first stirred his enthusiasm in this direction—an opinion shared by Mrs. Cooper. But however that may have been, it is certain that the boy knew every picture in Dunes Hall by heart. There were many pictures there and they were good—and it was to stare at them and blindly to adore them that Boot-boy Cooper rose early six days out of seven.

One figures to oneself the poor little devil—sleepy-eyed, creeping about the great house through the grey dawn in his stockings, gazing at the pictures he loved without knowing why, rapt wonder on his oddly delicate, refined, girlish face (so quaintly unlike the practically featureless visage of his bucolic father) understanding the carefully painted work without knowing that he understood it, with

marvels in his brain though none guessed it yet, furtive as a mouse, timid as a fawn, ready to bolt for the boot-hole at the sound of a tread. . . .

He was staring at the Corot landscape in the hall, with puzzled eyes, on the morning after Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth arrived, when some instinct urged him to look round. He did so—and was startled almost to the screaming-point.

For a large man, and fat, was watching him. He had not heard the man approach. But the panic died down quickly—for the man was smiling in a very friendly way. Also he looked good natured. Also he was eating a large, handsome, excessively curranty rock cake. (Mr. Bunn always maintained that eating that rock cake at that hour of the morning was The Bravest Deed He Ever Did.)

"Hello, sonny. Looking at the pictures, hey?" said Mr. Bunn.

"Y-yes, sir," faltered Boot-boy Cooper.

"And very nice, too, sonny, very nice, too. Now, that's a very pretty picture. Have a rock cake, sonny?" He produced a paper bag.

"T-thank you, sir." Timidly the boy took it. Too shy to eat it, he stared solemnly at this fairy godfather.

Mr. Bunn bit a large piece off his cake, and moved closer to the Corot, affecting not to notice the boy.

"Eat your cake before it gets stale, son. I must say I *do* like a good rock cake, don't you, hey?"

"Yes, sir." The mouse nibbled—while Smiler stared at the picture.

"Yes, that's very pretty. You can see that it's getting on towards supper-time in that picture, can't you, sonny? —on a kind of misty evening. Is that mist—or is it smoke from a fire in somebody's garden?"

"It's mist, sir. But it isn't so much like mist as it used to be. It's mistier, sir."

"Mistier, hey, sonny? How's that?"

"It's later in the evening than it used to be, sir."

"Later, is it?"

"Yes, sir—last week the picture was like the evening is

at six o'clock in September—now it's like it is at seven o'clock, sir."

"It's different, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Supposing somebody had changed the picture, sonny—taken away the six o'clock one and put this one in its place—hey, sonny?"

The boy gaped. Clearly this had not occurred to him. No doubt he had subconsciously regarded the picture belonging to the high, powerful, god-like people spoken of reverently even by the Butler Himself, as "Billionaires!" as something no more likely to be changed than the church tower or the kitchen range. He had accepted the idea that it could change in the manner that the twilight changes—but that the one which depicted six o'clock could be taken and another which depicted seven o'clock substituted had obviously never occurred to him.

He looked sharply at the picture, then back to Mr. Bunn, and his face changed. He smiled like a child who has solved a puzzle.

"How's that for an idea, sonny? Is it the same picture as the one which was hanging up here two nights ago?"

"No, sir." Boot-boy Cooper's voice was as definite and decisive as the sharp edge of an axe.

"You're sure of it, hey, son. Point out one or two things which are different."

Airily, the lad did so—a dozen things—"The shadows under the leaves here was different, sir—and the colour of the place where the sunset was showing is colder—" he was running on, when Mr. Bunn stopped him.

"That'll be all right, my son," he said, eyeing him with a certain admiration. "You may be a boot-boy, laddie, but you've got an eye like a hawk for a picture. Here, take this, my boy." He crammed some silver in the small fist. "You're a good little lad, and—you've dealt yourself a better hand than you know. Yes, my boy—four aces and the joker. All right, sonny. Finish your rock-cake and—er—you may as well finish mine for me while you're at it."

And so saying, Mr. Bunn ruffled the boy's hair with a

clumsily friendly gesture and moved away towards his room.

"I knew it," he muttered. "Yes, sir, the old man knew it. They've got to rise early if they're going to catch any early worms belonging to the old man—me. Nose like a point-blank bloodhound—eyes like a condemned old crow!"

And so proceeded to Fortworth's room.

"Wake up, Squire—this is our busy day," he said loudly in his irascible partner's ear—and Fortworth woke in no uncertain manner. . . .

The autumn mists still hung like grey veils upon all, wet and heavy and salt with the smell of the sea that was crawling languidly about the flats, when the partners' big limousine, driven by Sing Song, with Mr. Bunn, Fortworth, two detectives, and Boot-boy Cooper aboard, rolled silently away from Dunes Hall, nosing out to the London road.

Fortworth was in a contrary mood.

"Perhaps now you've got us out of bed, out of the house, and travelling as hard as the car can take us away from breakfast," he remarked, "it wouldn't strain you to give us some idea of what it's all about and what sense there is in it?"

"Sure, sure," said Mr. Bunn. "Sure, I will."

Mr. Bunn selected a cigar, carefully lit it, and settling comfortably down in his fur coat, surveyed his little company with a benign and fatherly gaze.

"We're going to fetch little Victor Beauray back to his mamma," he said. "I've decided that he's been away quite long enough."

Detective-Inspector Rufton gurgled surprisedly.

"D'ye mean to say you know where he is, sir?"

"No, I can't say I definitely know, Inspector. But Cooper and I have got a hunch that we can lay our hands on the missing boy and the missing Corot very shortly—yes, very shortly—hey, sonny?"

Boot-boy Cooper broke off his solo upon the ginger-beer bottle long enough to agree shyly.

"You mean to say, sir, you have found out how he was stolen and by whom?" persisted the detective.

"I guess I have. Maybe the old man is wrong—maybe not. We shall see."

"You say 'the missing Corot'. D'you mean that the picture in the hall was changed—the original stolen and another put in its place?"

"We do that—don't we, son?"

"But both Mr. and Mrs. Beauray, and Mr. Rush and Mr. and Mrs. le Hay, all large buyers of good pictures, have seen the picture in the hall a dozen times since the night of the kidnapping, and they have not noticed the exchange. Are you *sure,* sir?"

"Me sure? No. *I* don't understand pictures, myself."

"Then, if you don't mind my asking, sir, how do you know the genuine Corot has been taken and a substitute left?"

"Cooper says so," said Mr. Bunn.

"Cooper!" The detectives turned to gaze upon the shrinking boot-boy, as if he were a small beetle that had crept out from under the seat to express an opinion upon art matters.

"Cooper! . . . Do you know anything about pictures, my lad?"

"No, sir," said Cooper.

They all turned in amazement upon the blandly smiling Mr. Bunn.

Who waved his cigar.

"That's all right," he said cheerfully. "He knows more about pictures than the total population of Dunes Hall and this car combined—but he doesn't know he knows it. Instinct—gift—genius—born with it."

They stared, obviously doubtful.

"But what's it got to do with little Victor Beauray anyway?" said Fortworth, interested in spite of himself.

Mr. Bunn gazed reproachfully at his partner.

"Listen, Squire," he said, "listen while I quote something a man once said to you and me. This is what he said—and I always think he put it very well, very well in-

deed: *'My artistic passion carried me away. I have always suffered from an obsession for those little things by Constable, the art of De Wint to me is a perpetual joy, and I love to bask in the rays of the genius of Prout——'"*

"Paradix Dix, by G—d!" shouted Fortworth. "He said that when we found him stealing pictures at le Hay's place at Brillingham!" The detectives were staring meaningly at each other.

"Correct!" smiled Mr. Bunn.

"And you think he exchanged this Corot?"

"I do. Killed two birds with one stone. Kidnapped the boy and pinched the Corot at the same time. Probably he had a copy of the Corot. I shouldn't be surprised if le Hay gave the picture to the Beaurays. Dix probably saw it at Brillingham Castle, where he was a guest—until we ran him out—but didn't get the chance to make the exchange at Brillingham. He learnt that the Corot has gone to Dunes Hall, and when he made his plans to kidnap the boy, decided to get the picture as well. He would have pulled it off if Cooper hadn't had a better eye for a picture than our friends back at Dunes. But the man was greedy—and greed gets it in the neck nine times out of ten. He's a smart lad, is Paradix Dix—I always said so—but he's greedy. If he'd left the picture alone he would never have been suspected. As it was I smelt a badger the moment I heard a picture—a *good* picture—mentioned. That's all. You only need to keep your brains simmering in a case like this and it's simple, hey? Ever heard of this Dix, Inspector?"

The detectives smiled.

"*We* call him 'Buttery Ben.' He's as slippery as an eel. He's a crook we've been watching for a long time. But I think we've got him this time."

"Yes, I think so, too," said Mr. Bunn complacently. "I'm glad I took the trouble to ferret out where he lives some time back."

(Mr. Bunn had done this shortly after their Ascot adventure, at some expense to himself and much profit to the private inquiry agent who had shadowed Dix from the

Astoritz Hotel, where he frequently dined, one night. But he did not tell the detectives this.)

"You know his address, sir?"

"I do," said Mr. Bunn, and gave it—a village some fifteen miles north-east of London. "And unless I have backed the worst also-ran that every spoiled good turf that's where we shall find Victor Beauray *and* the painting by the late Mussoor Corot! And that's that."

The detectives were smiling and happy.

"You ought to have been a detective yourself, sir," said the Inspector.

"I'll say so," agreed the old rascal. "But on the whole I prefer to be a gentleman of private means, close friend and trusted adviser of several millionaires."

"Yes—you're right, of course, sir, on the whole," said the detective, wistfully. . . .

The rest was simple.

It was without any attempt at concealment that the partners' big car drove up to the entrance of a quiet, unpretentious house lying a little back from the road half hidden by shrubberies, in the Essex village which Mr. Paradix Dix utilised as his country headquarters. And it was without any loss of time that the competent five, including Sing Song, the Chink, swiftly posted themselves at all the immediately apparent bolt holes.

"If I know anything about Paradix, he won't be out of bed yet," said Mr. Bunn, as with sleuthhound Rufton he arrived at the front door.

There was no immediate answer to their knock.

It was very silent in the morning sunshine. They waited a moment.

From somewhere at the back came the sound of Fortworth and the junior sleuth knocking at the back door, and a powerful motor bicycle said "Tuff-tuff-tuff" as it came out of a lane on to the main road. But these noises died out and the silence fell again.

"Nobody up, hey?" said Mr. Bunn, and was at the point of repeating his fantasia on the knocker when the door was opened by a woman—a hard-looking, healthy,

but worn woman, quite obviously a "daily" woman from the village.

"Is Mr. Dix at home?" asked the Inspector.

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he is? I am a police detective, so please answer carefully."

"No," said the woman, not much moved by the Inspector's manner.

"That's very helpful," said Mr. Bunn, sarcastically. "Is Mrs. Dix in?"

"No, sir. She went with Mr. Dix. They've not been gone ten minutes. They went in a great hurry—on the motor-bicycle. I wonder you didn't hear it."

The detective ground his teeth.

"I did," he snarled.

"Well, is the little boy here still?" asked Mr. Bunn, quite casually.

Her hard face lighted up.

"Yes, sir—having his breakfast."

"*Hah!* Good—very good!" exploded Mr. Bunn.

"He's a dear little boy, sir," volunteered the daily lady, leading the way.

"He is," agreed Smiler. "In fact, you might almost say expensive."

Victor Beauray was at the moment heavily in action with porridge and jam. He did not desire to be interrupted, and was obviously prepared to resist most lungfully any disturbance. That may have been the chief reason why the Dixes, when, on catching one glimpse of the Bunn cohort, they made their frantic dive for safety, via motor-bicycle, did not take Victor with them. They had perhaps ten seconds to get out of the house to their motor-bicycle and away. It takes at least that time to separate a healthy, hungry, five-year-old from porridge and jam. They did not risk it. They did not even risk waiting long enough to fetch the Corot from the dining-room.

According to the story of the daily woman, as subsequently gleaned by Mr. Bunn, they had been in the room

with Victor when Mr. Dix, glancing out of the window, saw Mr. Bunn and Co. alighting from the car.

"Come," he had said briefly to his wife.

And they had gone forthwith. . . .

They were back at Dunes Hall just about in time for lunch—with the exception of the junior detective, left in charge at Mr. Paradix Dix's late residence, but it was not until he and his partner had disposed of a meal which went far to make up for the omission of breakfast from their day, that Mr. Bunn, enthroned in a gigantic easy chair in the library with a cigar in full blast gave them all particulars.

The Beaurays, le Hays, and Mr. Rush listened attentively, admiringly, in silence.

"——but at the same time you want to understand," concluded Mr. Bunn, generously, "that if it hadn't have been for Boot-boy Cooper it would probably have taken us a good deal longer to get the little lad back, hey, Squire."

"Squire" Fortworth agreed.

"That young fellow is a very remarkable cock," said Smiler. "And nobody need feel offended when I say that he knows by instinct more about pictures than all the rest of us put together. That's how it goes, of course. The wealthy own these works—which is as it should be, to my mind—but the quaint classes, artists, cranks, geniuses, vegetarians, antique sharps, story writers, and Boot-boy Cooper understand 'em. If anyone steals a midsummer scene by Bill Corot, say, and puts a skating scene by Jim Constable, say, in its place, *we* should probably notice it. But it calls for a Boot-boy Cooper to notice an hour's difference in the colour of the mist and shadows, due to bad copying. So I'm going to ask you to give the lad a lift. Give him a chance to put paint on canvas—it's more in his line than putting polish on your boots. The lad's a genius."

Henry le Hay, the lard billionaire, spoke impressively.

"*I* will take hold of Boot-boy Cooper," he announced.

"I am god-father to Victor, and I guess I'm entitled to make some contribution to the reward. Boot-boy Cooper can be regarded as provided for. His future is assured. If he is afflicted with artistic genius he shall have his chance. If he is not afflicted with genius he shall be put into the lard business and other benefits bestowed upon him."

It was a long speech for Lard le Hay, but it was good for Boot-boy Cooper.

And while on the subject of "rewards" it may be mentioned that Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth allowed themselves no grounds whatever for regret at the size of the colossal hack which they themselves took at the teeming financial resources controlled by the families to which they had been of such service.

Ebney Rush and Lard le Hay were the broad-minded kind of millionaires who, in such a matter, would say, in effect, "Name your reward!"

And Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth were the broad-minded kind of rascals who would—and did—name it in no uncertain nor over-modest fashion. . . .

Paradix Dix was not arrested. The Beaurays weren't vindictive enough about him; Detective-Inspector Rufton wasn't encouraged enough to catch him; and the Bunn Co. weren't interested enough in him to put him into a position of any great jeopardy.

So that the exact means by which he achieved the kidnapping was not discovered. Probably he had found it comparatively simple—for he was a very ingenious and fertile-minded gentleman, though, as Mr. Bunn put it, "greedy—a little greedy—and on the whole, unlucky."

And that was true. He *was* unlucky—when he ran up against such a skilled and experienced brace of fish-hooks as Mr. Bunn and ex-Lord Fortworth. But then, as Mr. Bunn said, "we cannot all be lucky—if we were there would be no such thing as luck."

JOHN FERGUSON

THE WHITE LINE

BEFORE McNab had negotiated the pivoted chair at the dinner table in the *Magnificent*—it was her first night out from Sandy Hook—he was greeted by a feminine welcome.

"So we meet again, Mr. McNab."

Mrs. Westmacott looked up at him with a smile on her clever face. She was a chance acquaintance made on the journey from Washington. McNab expressed his pleasure.

"You are in luck," said she with a nod.

"So I see," he returned with a ceremonious bow.

"Poof! It's not because they placed you next *me*. You didn't think I meant *that!*"

McNab looked around as he picked up his spoon.

"Well, it's the luckiest thing I perceive at the moment. Quite enough to content me," he added.

"Why, man, they've given you a front seat for the comedy, and you don't know it. What a waste! There are people on board who'd give a thousand dollars, cash down, to change places with you."

"I wouldn't accept," said McNab, "unless you changed also."

"Ah! And in the train you denied you were Irish!"

To this McNab's only response was an enigmatic smile. People at the tables *were* a little hushed, subdued. But that was the usual state of affairs on the first night out. Later, when they got to know each other, the laughter and the chatter would flow. But the scene that met his eye was gay enough with the women's multicoloured frocks and the shimmer of their jewels.

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"Do you never ask questions, Mr. McNab?"

As he turned to her Mrs. Westmacott made a moue at him, evidently anxious to impart the information his roving glance had failed to discover. He laughed—internally—at the notion that he was an incurious person. His head ached yet with investigations which had kept his mind keyed up for weeks.

"I was looking for the comedy you spoke of," he said.

Mrs. Westmacott turned to him, the morsel of fish poised on the end of her fork.

"And found it?"

He shook his head.

She leant towards him confidentially.

"To the right—opposite—the girl in black—between the two young men. You must recognise her."

"I am not up in types of American beauty—not feminine ones anyhow," he amended. "Still, I seem to—"

"I should think so, indeed. Her picture is in every paper. That is Sally Silver."

"Really? Sally Silver? Now where have I heard that name before?"

Mrs. Westmacott laughed.

"How perfectly delicious you are. Oh, how I wish she could hear you!"

"I can be wonderfully dense," McNab admitted. "The times I've missed things under my very nose—you'd never believe. Tell me about her."

"She's Henry Silver's only child—and you won't say you haven't heard of *him!* She's just twenty, and the biggest catch that ever came out of a Chicago pig-pen. But no man's caught her yet."

McNab was regarding the girl with interest. He had wondered already why her presence there had drawn all eyes in her direction. The girl was undeniably pretty, but scarcely beautiful. There was not enough repose in her face for real beauty. The headlong pursuit of pleasure, the eager search for new sensations, were visibly marked on her restless and uneasy face. Her face, McNab

thought, would miss the beauty designed for it, and become in a year or two the ruins of what it had *never* been! He felt a certain pity for her.

"The most envied girl we have just now," Mrs. Westmacott remarked. "Her diamonds alone make the women hate her."

"She is wearing none."

"No. That is her pose for the moment. The little puss knows very well all the women on board are dying to see the famous Vernese necklace her doting father has just bought for her. That is why she has left it in her cabin."

"And they hate her still more for that?"

"Naturally."

McNab resumed his dinner.

"The men don't seem to miss the diamonds," he observed.

"No. She has a fine neck, and her shoulders are—well, brave."

McNab again looked over at the two men and the girl. With both elbows resting on the table, and with her chin on her clasped hands, she was still listening to the young man on her right, while the youth on her left, who had been getting her shoulder all through, sat crumbling his bread gloomily.

"The two favourites in the race," Mrs. Westmacott explained *sotto voce*.

"Not much doubt which is making the running."

Mrs. Westmacott looked at him almost in contempt.

"You men!" she said. "You think because at the moment she's showing a preference for Jefferson Melhuish she has turned down young Hilary Harben for good."

"Well, by the look on his face young Hilary Harben seems to share my view."

"Very likely he does, being a man. But any woman could tell him it doesn't follow. The minx knows the betting has lately been on Harben."

McNab was startled.

"What!" he cried. "You don't mean to say people are betting on it. I call that almost indecent."

"Indecent? I like that! You English who flog horses to make them run races for you to bet on—you call this indecent! Why, Sally Silver is proud to know America is betting on this, and both men must know it. Notoriety, Mr. McNab, may not be so fine a thing as fame, but it is better than obscurity. As for Hilary's chances, I'm not sorry my money is on him."

"*You* have a bet on this?"

"I have. I stand to win what will pay my six months' trip to Europe twice over. You are surprised? You think I should have backed Melhuish, who is good-looking and wealthy, while Harben is almost poor, and still has that limp he got in the war?" She tapped McNab lightly on the arm and breathed into his ear: "That lameness is no handicap in a woman's eyes. You put something on him, too. You'll get long odds. No? Well, you'll see, in two days there won't be a soul on board from the ambassador to the stewardess who hasn't made a bet on it."

And Mrs. Westmacott proved to be right. The daily sweepstake on the ship's progress was thin and tame compared with the zest and excitement aroused by the betting on Melhuish and Harben. McNab marvelled over it. They were all like children, he thought. There was nothing to show—so far as he could see—that Miss Silver must necessarily choose either of her suitors, much less choose one of them before they reached port. It was just a chance. He pointed out the absurdity of the thing one night in the smoking-room, and half-a-dozen voices promptly offered to bet him on that very chance. McNab went away puzzled. They could not really know. Of course, on board a liner the pace and rhythm of life quickened enormously. Minutes were as hours on land, and hours held as much in them as days. So many things happened quickly, things that would scarcely happen at all, to the same people anyway, ashore. That must be why they were all so confident something was bound to happen in the matter of Sally Silver.

Now, McNab was a keen student of human nature. Professionally his concern was with the darker side, but his connection with New Scotland Yard had not made him a narrow specialist; he remained interested in humanity, in all its infinite variety, which fact is probably the secret of his great professional success. Therefore, McNab turned an eye on Miss Silver, on her two suitors, and on the betting over their chances with all the interest he was wont to give to the study of innocent human foibles in his moments of leisure. The men, he found, all betted on Melhuish, who appeared to be well aware of the fact. He had a way of twirling up his moustache, a way of smiling till you caught just a glimpse of his gold-filled teeth that seemed to irritate the women. But the men backed him as confidently. And the women without exception backed Harben.

For three long days the good-looking, immaculate Melhuish basked in Miss Silver's honeyed smiles, while young Harben limped along the deck to his solitary chair, followed by the sympathetic glances of the ladies.

Then on the fourth day a change came. It came just at the moment when Melhuish's triumph seemed complete, when the men, convinced their bets were safe, were ceasing to chuckle among themselves, and the women almost began to doubt. That is to say, just when interest threatened to die down, Miss Sally Silver took it into her wayward head to readjust matters. Very early on the fourth morning one of Melhuish's backers, coming on deck, found her and Harben, the deck chairs side by side, holding each other's hands! The news circulated with mysterious quickness. At breakfast the men exchanged uneasy glances with each other. By lunch time they were whispering together about it in odd corners. And all through the long afternoon there was a *hush* on the ship that reminded McNab of a Sunday afternoon he once had to pass in Tunbridge Wells. For all that afternoon Miss Silver and young Harben sat together, and Melhuish paced the deck alone, gnawing the end of his moustache. To the men who covertly watched the pair

on the hurricane deck the afternoon seemed an eternity. What it seemed to Melhuish none but Melhuish knew, and he did not tell.

At tea Mrs. Westmacott crossed to the corner in which McNab sat with Colonel Baylis.

"Well?" she said brightly.

The colonel almost scowled.

"It won't last!" he snapped.

The lady thrilled with triumph.

"I hear some of you men are already trying to hedge. Now *we* never did that!"

"Our man's not done yet."

She turned to McNab.

"Is that your view?"

"Well, I don't know. He's of the type that takes what he wants."

"It won't last, you'll see," the colonel repeated as Mrs. Westmacott returned with the sugar basin. "That monkey is only taking Harben up to give the women a bigger drop. She knows that the cats don't love her much."

He stirred his tea angrily. Mrs. Westmacott held out the sugar basin to him.

"An extra lump to-day?" she suggested sweetly.

But after dinner that night the affair took a new turn, one which brought McNab into the business in real earnest, in his professional capacity.

It was a fine, still night, with the moon approaching the full, and McNab had gone up to the long hurricane deck to finish his cigar while taking a little gentle exercise. It was still early, but most of the men were down below in the smoking-rooms, while the ladies were in the music saloon. McNab therefore had the deck almost to himself as he paced up and down, first up one side and then down the other, with the long row of staterooms occupying the centre. So quiet was it that above the throb-throbbing of the vessel, as she cut her way across the smooth sea, McNab could distinguish the distant tinkling of a piano. But the deck, with its row of white, untenanted cabins, was like a deserted village, dominated by four great red incon-

gruous chimney stacks. He was watching the silent rolling columns of black smoke from the funnels, following the smoke till it thinned out and the moonlight came through it, when his ear caught a sharp sound behind him. It was like the opening of a door which has been recently varnished, when some of the varnish has adhered close to the hinges—a crack, short and abrupt. The unexpectedness of the sound on that quiet, deserted deck, the contrast it made to the continuous throbbing of the screw, caught his attention. But after the little start it gave him, interrupting his thoughts, he resumed his silent promenade without giving any more heed to the occurrence. When he reached the aft termination of the deck, however, he found something that amused him—Miss Sally Silver was sitting there *alone*.

Several times that evening in the course of his promenade he had come close enough to see Harben seated by her side and hear the murmur of their voices. Not ten minutes earlier Harben had been there; but now his chair was vacant, a rug lying on the deck looked as if it had been tossed aside. The girl, her elbow on the arm of the chair, and her hand beneath her chin—a characteristic attitude—seemed to be gazing dejectedly into vacancy. If there had been a quarrel, and all the symptoms pointed to it, McNab smiled to think how, once known, it would stir the ship from end to end. Who would have dreamed that the affair would end, not with Sally Silver leaving Harben, but with Harben leaving Sally Silver!

Now McNab was by instinct and occupation an observer, not a talker. So he simply turned on his heel and continued his promenade. Turned on his heel, he distinctly remembered that afterwards. That is to say, instead of crossing over the deck and continuing down the other side as he had been doing for the best part of an hour, he for the first time went back the way he had come.

He had gone half the length of the deck when he saw a man step out of a state-room a little way ahead, close the door gently, and come quickly towards him. Then the man pulled up suddenly, as if at sight of McNab, hesitated an

instant, and came on again. McNab, though the figure passed him with down-bent head and in the shadow of the deck houses, recognised him from his limp as young Harben. He was probably on his way to make it up with the girl, McNab thought with a smile, observing as he passed that the cabin bore the number 13. Looking back, he saw Harben now in the full moonlight, awkwardly, painfully limping aft. McNab, tossing the butt of his cigar overboard, took out his watch. It was thirteen minutes to nine; his exercise was over. So he went to the lower deck.

He had been in the crowded smoking-room for nearly an hour, indolently watching a group playing poker for rather high stakes, when a man entered so hurriedly and noisily as to attract immediate attention.

"Heard the latest?" he asked almost breathlessly.

There was so much significance in his tremulous tones that even those who had not cast a glance at his entrance looked up from their game. Indeed, everyone present looked up hopefully. Men reading put their magazines on their knees, even the man dealing out the cards arrested his arm in mid-air to regard the speaker. For it was obvious there was something new in the Silver-Melhuish-Harben affair—or, at least, they hoped so. McNab thought he knew what it was, and that he could have told them as much when he had entered an hour ago. He was slightly amused by this man's snatching at a piece of news which gave him a temporary importance.

"No!" came a chorus of impatient voices as the fellow hung on, enjoying the interest he had aroused.

"Sally's necklace has gone."

"Gone?"

"Stolen from her cabin to-night."

"Is that all? Serve her jolly well right!" someone grunted in disgust. There came a chorus of approval.

The dealer continued with his cards and the old gentlemen lifted their magazines again.

"What else could she expect—canoodling up there with *that* fellow?"

The chorus of agreement seemed to McNab unfair. Had

the thing happened when Melhuish was the girl's favourite the judgment would have been otherwise, and Melhuish would not have been "*that* fellow."

"She'll never get it back. The crooks on liners are smart."

"But on a ship—after all—they can't run away."

"You'll see. Depend on it they had a hiding-place ready for the swag before it was lifted."

"This comes of her choosing cabin 13 out of pure bounce."

"I remember once—"

McNab heard no more. He left the saloon. He wanted to think.

Cabin 13! He was quite sure that was the one out of which he had seen Harben come. Harben of course might have been sent there for some purpose by Miss Silver herself. There was against that theory—it could easily be settled by Miss Silver—his hesitation on catching sight of someone approaching, and the furtive manner in which he had slunk past, in the shadow; close to the deck houses. But, again, Harben must have known that his limp would betray him. If he had no guilt, why had he been furtive?

Harben was no professional crook, of course, for the expert would not have been taken by surprise, and besides, he was, like his rival Melhuish, an old friend of the Silver family. But why had Harben been surprised to see him? It was to this question McNab recurred most. Harben must have been aware that he had been walking the deck all the time. Then whence came the surprise? He had hesitated and stopped for a moment at sight of him. Why?

Suddenly the detective smote his fist on the taff rail as an explanation burst upon him. Of course!

"I'd been walking round and round the deck houses until I saw the girl and the empty chair," he muttered. "Just like a policeman on his beat. But that last time I *turned back*. And when he came out of the cabin he calculated that I'd be on the other side. But what a fool the man was not to put the thing back once he *knew* he had been seen."

McNab lighted another cigar reflectively. Perhaps, he mused, Harben had no chance to go back. Perhaps, as was not uncommon, he supposed his lameness less noticeable than it actually was, and believed he had avoided detection. The furtive slinking along in the shadows suggested he had that belief.

The detective, in his dark corner, grinned to himself. Harben would probably stick to the diamonds; he did not know with whom he had been playing that little game of "Here we go round the mulberry bush" up there in the moonlight! There was little danger of such an amateur in crime as Harben getting frightened and dropping the things overboard. He must need them badly indeed. Had he come away without sufficient funds for the trip? He could not take money from Miss Silver, and he would salve any qualms by telling himself it was for her sake, her ultimate happiness. Later he would tell her all, perhaps; own up, and she would cry out: "You poor boy! Why didn't you ask me for the money?" So the young fool would picture the happy ending!

McNab had no desire to thrust his professional services on those concerned—indeed, he did not suppose his services would be required—but being well aware of a witness's duties in such matters, he went to see Miss Silver. Miss Silver, however, had retired, prostrated by her loss, so the maid informed him. Well, his knowledge of Harben's movements would keep till morning. McNab himself sought his berth.

Next morning he was much later at breakfast than usual. He had slept badly. He had not, somehow, been able to dismiss this case from his mind so easily. He had lain awake, thinking it out. He had traversed all the facts repeatedly, and some features of the thing left him doubtful. He was, however, scarcely seated before he sensed that something new had happened. People stood about in little groups with their heads together. There were noddings and whisperings. Mrs. Westmacott, observing him, came across and took a place beside him.

"Well," she said, "you've heard what they're saying?"

"No. What is it?"

"They say the thief is a man with a limp. He was seen coming out of her state-room."

McNab almost bounded out of his chair.

"What?" he cried. "What's that you say?"

"Ah, you know what that means. There aren't many lame men aboard, are there?"

"I've seen only one."

"Well, that seems to fasten the thing on him all right. Do *you* think he did it?"

McNab regained his self-control. He looked at her fixedly.

"I did," he said, "till you told me others are saying he did it."

"What on earth do you mean by that?"

"It sounds odd, but the explanation is simple: *I* was the only person who saw him come out of her state-room."

Her woman's wit took her at a bound to the vital point.

"And you have not mentioned it to anyone?"

McNab looked at her in admiration.

"Not unless I've been talking in my sleep."

"And do you?" she asked anxiously.

"No," he replied with a grin. "That is one of the things forbidden us at Scotland Yard."

Her face changed from anxiety to amazement.

"Scotland Yard! Are you—?"

"Hush! Just tell me who you think did it."

"Melhuish," she rejoined promptly. "He is your man."

McNab shook his head.

"It doesn't follow. The first question to ask in the presence of a crime is, *cui bono—who benefits?"*

"Well, *he* does. Sally will certainly—"

He put a hand on her arm restrainingly.

"Yes, but this Vernese necklace in itself supplies a sufficient motive to a few hundreds of us, perhaps. Melhuish had *one* motive which no one else but Harben shared, that is Sally Silver herself. But the motive of Sally Silver's diamonds would be equally strong for a far larger number."

"Still, I feel *sure* it was Melhuish. Something tells me."

"Yes, your dislike of him. And if I were to put the case before any of these men, they would, for the same reason, be equally sure it was Harben."

"And you?" she asked.

"I suspect everyone but you. That is why I ask your help."

"Me!" she flushed with excitement. "Women are said to talk."

"They do. So do men. Look at them."

As he reached for the marmalade he nodded towards a group of men in eager converse.

"You mean to take up this case?"

"Yes. You see, this infernal thief has brought me into it. He *used* me. That's what it amounts to. For if it was someone who imitated Harben's limp, and affected hesitation at the sight of me, he expects me to say I had seen Harben coming out of the cabin. He used *me:* that stings, you know. If it was Harben himself—"

McNab broke off pensively.

"You need my help because the thief knows you know and will be on the watch?" Mrs. Westmacott asked.

"Especially when he finds I shall say nothing. You see," he went on, "we have not merely to detect the thief but to keep him, if he is startled, from dropping the necklace over the side."

Mrs. Westmacott sighed with a half wry smile.

"To think I should find myself trying to save *her* necklace. I shouldn't *dream* of doing it if I wasn't *sure* Hilary Harben is innocent. You can't be sure that someone else wasn't hiding up there, watching both you and him."

"I don't deny it. Anything is possible. And if Harben is cleared, so much the better for your bet. Can I count on you?"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"Very little—and that little easy. I am not going to report what I saw to Miss Silver or to the captain. I am not going to make any enquiry. I am going to sit out on the promenade deck entirely absorbed in a book. All I want

you to do is to stroll over, and give me news of what happens from hour to hour."

"It sounds just a man's idea of a woman's job! But what if nothing happens?"

"Then come and tell me."

At eleven she came to him with her first report. Harben had tried to see Miss Silver, but had been refused admission. A notice had been posted asking anyone who had been on the hurricane deck between the hours of eight and ten to see the purser in his office.

At half past eleven she reported having seen Miss Silver and Melhuish together on the upper deck.

At noon she returned with the news that Harben's cabin was then being searched. There was a crowd outside the door. McNab sent her off to join the crowd, while he sat on apparently engrossed in his book.

She was back in half an hour. Nothing had been found, of course. She laughed:

"The amusing thing is that Harben finds that he himself has been robbed. Oh, it's nothing of consequence—just a leather collar-box missing."

"Ah!"

There was so much significance in the ejaculation that she was startled.

"Did Harben mention it?"

"No, the steward who does his cabin did."

"A leather collar-box? It would just do to hold the necklace, I suppose."

McNab lay back again in his chair and shut his eyes, while Mrs. Westmacott waited.

She waited a long time, or so it seemed to her. She began to think McNab must have fallen asleep, so still was he. Then he startled her again.

"What is the colour of Harben's door, red or green?" he asked.

"Neither; it is white," she replied, wondering if he were mad.

"Good! Do you think you could get me a ball of wool?"

"A ball of wool?" she cried. "What for?"

"To snare the thief. If any lady friend can provide a ball of wool, we have him."

"Heavens above us!" she murmured, aghast.

"Let me see," he went on, "there is to be some sort of entertainment to-night, isn't there?"

She welcomed what seemed a return to sanity.

"Yes—a concert. The Orpheus String Quartette have kindly—"

"Well," he cut in, "for the sake of variety we'll provide a conjuring trick also—if you can find me that ball of wool."

* * * * * * * * *

Mrs. Westmacott was very nervous at the concert—thoroughly disquieted about McNab. Of course, the recent events had upset everyone; but the soothing effect of classical music is well known, and perhaps that is why practically every passenger in the ship was present. Even Miss Silver came in before the interval, looking very pale and tired, leaning on the arm of Melhuish. Melhuish, after finding her a seat, left the saloon, returning with a wrap for her just before the interval. McNab, Mrs. Westmacott saw, was very fidgety. He kept looking at his watch, glancing keenly about him. When the interval came, most of the men seemed ready for a stimulant. She saw Colonel Baylis approach McNab with an invitation on his face; and she did not miss the curt refusal he received. The men began to filter towards the door. Captain York, who was acting as chairman, rose and tapped the table.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing those who were moving towards the door, "I regret very much that for the moment it will be impossible for anyone to leave this saloon. You are aware that a necklace, a very valuable necklace, has disappeared from the cabin of one of our lady passengers. A general search for it, which I am sure no honourable or innocent person here will resent, is now in progress. There are, unfortunately, black sheep in most ships of—"

Mrs. Westmacott saw McNab rise to his feet.

"Excuse me," he said in calm, determined tones. "There is no need to detain these gentlemen, nor to disarrange their baggage. The necklace is in a leather collar-box in Mr. Hilary Harben's cabin."

A tense hush fell on the saloon—a moment's breathless silence, and then Harben, pushing aside the men in his way, came towards the platform with blanched face and clenched fists.

"That is a lie!" he called out. "I'll make you eat those words. How do you know what is, or what is not, in my cabin? Who are you?"

"I am the person who saw the man with the limp come out of Miss Silver's cabin last night."

An "Ah!" of astonishment ran round the saloon like a wave, and Mrs. Westmacott, sparing a glance for Miss Silver, saw the girl sink in her chair with both hands covering her face. Melhuish, standing beside the captain, was, like most, eagerly intent on McNab.

"I was not that man, I swear it!" Harben cried out helplessly, as if he did not expect them to believe him. And certainly nobody seemed to. Mrs. Westmacott saw the gleam of gold as Melhuish smiled. In the tense, painful silence which ensued, the ship's purser entered and handed up to Captain York the little leather collar-case. As he opened the thing and took out the necklace, the man whispered something to him, and it was evident to all from the way in which he stared at McNab, who was still on his feet, that it had been found where McNab had said.

"I swear I had no hand in this—I never took it!" Harben cried passionately again.

"I know you didn't," said McNab.

Melhuish, who had gone forward to receive the necklace from the captain, turned sharply.

"Since you know so much," said the captain, "perhaps you know who did?"

"I do," the reply came quietly, electrifying the whole saloon. "You see, at first I did think the thing had been done by this young gentleman. The man who passed me

outside cabin thirteen I took for Mr. Harben. But in the morning, when I heard that a man with a limp was seen coming out of the cabin, I knew it was someone else. I knew it must be someone else because I was alone on the deck, and had not spoken to *anyone* of what I saw. Anyone might have imitated his walk. Later in the day, when I heard of the missing collar-box, it was clear that the guilty person, through fear of discovery or some other reason, meant to fix the guilt on Mr. Harben. That little box which was missing in the forenoon would be found when the general search was made. The inference would be that it had been hidden till the earlier search was over, and when it was discovered later in his cabin with the necklace inside, the conclusion would be irresistible."

McNab paused while everyone hung on his words.

"All that was easy. The real difficulty lay in detecting the guilty man. It was, of course, useless to watch Mr. Harben's cabin all day. The real thief would not venture to go in so long as anyone was in sight. Well, the road was left open, and he did his trick exactly as I thought it would be done, about half an hour ago; and not a soul saw him do it."

Mrs. Westmacott sighed miserably as she saw Melhuish's face brighten on hearing McNab's last words. Captain York himself voiced her fear:

"Then you cannot prove who this black sheep is? I suppose we must be content with—"

McNab held up his hand.

"Pardon me, but that is exactly the task I set myself. I have *marked* the black sheep."

"How?"

Half-a-dozen cried out the question, and did not know they had spoken.

"The door of Mr. Harben's cabin is white. I fastened a length of wool from one side to the other, five feet five inches high, chalking it so that it was invisible against the door. The two broken ends will be found hanging there now, and the man who entered the cabin ought to have a

chalk line across the lapels of his coat exactly five feet five inches from the floor."

Instinctively Melhuish had looked down. He saw what all saw, a thin white line across the collar of his faultless dress coat.

Pitiably the man wilted. The tense silence was broken suddenly by a girl's voice.

"Hilary, oh Hilary, I am so glad! *So glad!*"

The words in themselves might have committed her to nothing, but there was that in her tones which led every man who heard them to settle his bet without a murmur.

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